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The Casino Theatre at Newport, Rhode Island, the Summer Colonists' Playhouse: Reality, Grandeur, Memories 1881-1960

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THE CASINO THEATRE AT NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND
THE SUMMER COLONISTS' PLAYHOUSE:
REALITY, GRANDEUR, MEMORIES 1881-1960

A dissertation

submitted by

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ABSTRACT

James Gordon Bennett., owner of the New York Herald, was the visionary founder of the Casino Theatre at Newport, Rhode Island. The Casino, a complex located on fashionable Bellevue Avenue, was recognized as the first complete resort facility in America. The theatre was an integral part of this complex. Between 1879 and 1881, this showcase was designed by the New York firm of McKim, Mead & White. White designed the theatre.

It is important to recognize that theatrical productions were a notable component of Newport life from pre-Revolutionary times. These theatrical endeavors were a prelude to the Newport Casino Theatre. It is a matter of record that Newport, in 1761., under the auspices of David Douglass, was the first in New England to host a public performance of a play. Later, between 1793 and 1799, Alexander Placide of Boston leased the Brick Market, the first formal structure of a theatre in the city. Buildings in which theatrical productions took place during the eighteenth century continue to exist today: the Brick Market, the Newport Opera House and the Strand Theatre, renamed the Jane Pickens. As in Shakespeare's time, both amateur and professional productions of this era were produced to be enjoyed by the ordinary citizens. In contrast, the Newport Casino theatre was exclusive from its beginnings.

In 1881., the Newport Casino Theatre opened with a dual purpose; it was used as a ballroom as well as a theatre. The summer colony whose identity links the institution with

prestige and grandeur became rooted in Newport and identified with the Newport Casino. Its theatre which is the focus of this study, is located in the Northeast corner of the Casino complex.

By the late nineteenth century, the wealthy summer colonists, who chose Newport as their premiere summer resort, concentrated both their wealth and their interest on furthering the development of the Newport Casino complex, including the theatre. From its inception until the late 1950s, when the theatre lost its distinct force because of a variety of social and economic circumstances, the colonists and the theatre enjoyed a symbiotic relationship. Characteristic of him, once the Casino was established, James Bennett had moved on to other things and only occasionally reappeared in Newport for purposes of raising additional monies. His absence provided the opportunity for others to emerge as outstanding sponsors of the theatre. Such familiar names associated with the Gilded Age as Vanderbilt, Astor, Belmont, Taylor and Glrich all contributed to placing the Casino at the forefront of Newport society.

Beginning in 1927, primarily through the initiative of Moses Taylor, the cotillion-theatre evolved into a legitimate theatre. Financial support of the summer colonists enabled the Casino management to draw from the world of the professional New York stage, and ushered in a new era that established the Casino Theatre as one of America's leading summer stock playhouses. For the second time in the theatre's history, this time through death, it lost its outstanding catalyst as Moses Taylor died suddenly following the first very successful season. For eight summers, however, the wealthy owned, governed and operated the theatre.

By 1934, the change in America's financial climate had a negative effect on the

Casino Theatre. The financial losses distracted the colonists from full corporate management. Actor Managers Inc., a theatrical producing agency from New York, headed by Helen Arthur well known to the New York stage, was hired as the new theatre management. During its four years of play producing, funds became increasingly scarce. In addition, Arthur died suddenly in 1939. New management came from the ranks of Actor Managers. It is of interest to note that three women, Marie Elkins, Emeline Roche and Nancy Rogers assumed the roles of leadership for one year. The following year Massey & Farrington of New York headed the theatre. Death once more intervened with the suicide of Massey, and the theatre closed.

An extended period of stable leadership began with the appointment of Sara Stamm as producer-director. She influenced every aspect of the theatre from 1943 to 1960. Her vision for the Casino Theatre was limitless. Stamm extended the previous boundaries of status and patronage. She believed that the theatre was for everyone and combined the academic with the best in stage production.

In the end, societal forces overcame her very best efforts, and the theatre founded by Bennett, supported by the colonists, extended under Arthur and Stamm's leadership to the general populace in Newport, closed in 1960. Its reopening in 1963 as a new entity had little resemblance to its past history.

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To the memory of my father,

Howard T. Riley

And for my mother,

Anna Veronica

What has been. has been, and I have had my hour.
Dryden, *Imitation of Horace.*, Book III, Ode 29, line 72

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INTRODUCTION

THE SEEDS OF THEATRE AT NEWPORT

Before the Casino Theatre came into existence, Newport, Rhode Island had a reputable theatrical history. The well-to-do mercantile citizen, pre- and post-Revolutionary War, enjoyed theatrical productions in Newport. Two locations of early Newport theatre were Dyers' Gate and the Brick Market. These will be considered in the Introduction as a prelude to the wide variety of theatrical productions performed in the Newport Casino Theatre during the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century.

Boasting a cosmopolitan atmosphere out of all proportion to its size, Newport became one of the country's significant small cultural centers. As a longstanding embodiment of materialistic values, Newport's tradition of wealth can be associated, in some measure, with the Newport Casino Theatre and the significant role it played in the theatrical tradition of the city. My aim is to investigate the history of the Newport Casino Theatre in order to gain a clear perspective not only on the life and history of the theatre but also on that life as it directly contributed to the mystique of the City by the Sea. This dissertation will concentrate on the significant impact of the Newport summer colonists on the Casino Theatre from its inception in 1881 until the late 1950s when the theatre lost its distinct force because of a variety of social and financial circumstances.

The Newport Casino Theatre located in the Casino complex on Bellevue Avenue was indigenous to Newport's late nineteenth and twentieth-century cultural history. Just

what was the importance of the Newport Casino Theatre to a city already rich in tradition? Reflecting the glamour of the gilded age, the Newport Casino was instrumental in keeping Newport on the map as the social capital of the world. The theatre served as a symbol of a particular time in the city's history which Newport enjoyed and exhibited to the rest of the world. The theatre building, which still stands today, reminds one of a period gone by, but nonetheless, one that holds a rightful place in the memory both of a city and a country.

At the same time, I would like to extend my hypothesis. That is, by studying the Newport Casino Theatre, what can I learn about performance and theatre in America during this period? In other words, was the Newport Casino theatre truly unique or did it resemble other theatres in various resort areas of the Northeast? Who was drawn to the Casino Theatre during its lifetime? Did the makeup of the audience change over the years? If so, what did this mean for the theatre? And importantly, what contributed to the Casino's demise? Throughout my research I hope to be able to consider these questions so as to better understand the Casino's theatrical history and subsequent contribution to Newport life.

By examining the Newport Casino Theatre's history, this study will trace the development of performance culture in phases, beginning with the pre Casino era. As introductory material, it will be necessary to discuss the theatre in Newport prior to the Casino Theatre. The main body of the text will analyze the Casino's history beginning with the theatre's origins in 1881 and ending in 1960. This will be an investigation of the character of the Casino Theatre and the nature of its life from the late nineteenth century through the turn of the twentieth century. I will pay particular attention to the years between 1927 and 1934, when the Casino Theatre was at its apex, and will consider the Casino

during the 1940s when it was sold to New Yorker, Sara Stamm. Finally, I will discuss the ways in which the theatre changed during the 1950s and examine the circumstances which eventually weakened its longstanding tradition. Although the theatre remained open until the mid-1980s, it bore no resemblance to the theatre discussed in this dissertation since the influence of the Newport summer colonists had ended.

[will take the reader back to a splendid age in Newport and examine in detail the theatrical presence of one of the only theatres, which the city's wealthy has ever called its own. In this study I will aim at deciphering how the Newport Casino Theatre made a noteworthy contribution to the Newport image. Precisely how did it influence the life of this small community and how lasting was that influence?

The present study will focus on one of Newport's most prestigious privately owned but publicly profiled institutions. By studying the theatrical history of a single theatre, [will analyze the impact audiences had on this theatre and its significant role in the cultural heritage of the city. It is essential to remember that the period between 1860 and 1914 is often referred to as the "Gilded Age" in American history. Newport at the time, highly reflected this environment. During the 1880s and 1890s, especially, a whole subgenre of American theatrical history existed in Newport. The city was noted for its lavish paratheatricals created by wealthy families. Although I intend to look briefly at a variety of these and judge how we can interpret them with respect to what we can learn about Newport, primarily, my focus still will be the Newport Casino Theatre during this time period. My aim throughout this study is to keep the theatre in the foreground and to interpret how its history affected the look and life of Newport. I want to give adequate attention to the Casino Theatre along with place that it holds in the cultural identity of Newport.

Theatrical performances of some kind took place in Newport as early as 1761. When England's expatriate David Douglass and his acting company returned from Jamaica, the troupe wanted to enlarge its dramatic circuit beyond Williamsburg, Virginia, its venue at the time.¹ Douglass had long desired to come to New England with his troupe. That he thought of Rhode Island **in** the first place may have been due to the fact that the colony was believed in great measure to be exempt from a sense of puritanism, and its reputation already was that of promoting the cultivation of all its citizens. During this time, in Massachusetts and Connecticut in particular, a general hostility prevailed against amusements of all kinds, and especially to stage plays. Boston, however, did find ways to skirt these bans at a later date.

At the first town meeting in Newport in 1761, permission for the Douglass players to perform in the town was denied. The acting group seemed determined, nonetheless, and built a temporary building anyway. Their initial performance was on 7 September 1761 and, as the *Newpon Mercury* records, in hindsight, nearly a century later, "the performances were well attended."² The proceeds were given to a Mr. George Gibbs, owner of farmland in Newport, for the purpose of planting corn and eventually distributing it to the poor. This may have turned out to be a prudent choice on Douglass's part because not long afterwards a second town meeting **convened** where the resulting vote was to permit the troupe to perform. Douglass's theatre structure stood at the upper part of the Point Section (Third Street) of Newport near Dyers Gate. Unfortunately, a gale blew it away that same year. Even though no one remembers what Douglass's building looked like, both tradition and written history identify the spot as Dyer's Gate.³ It is a matter of record that "the town of Newport claims the distinction of being the first place in New England in which a temple of

the muses was **raised**."⁴ Charles Blake's *An Historical Account of the Providence Stage* makes this same claim about Newport a year later in 1868.⁵ Still later, in 1891, in his *History of the Providence Stage, 1762-1891* George Willard confirms this as well. Willard makes it a point to correct Isaiah Thomas's word in the *History of Printing* that Providence was the first to host a public performance of a play. Willard counters Thomas's testimony, which often was repeated in other historical works. Willard remarks

It is true that the Virginia comedians played in Providence in 1762, but it cannot be controverted that they had performed in Newport the previous year. Were there no positive proof, it would still be a reasonable inference, judging from the relative importance of the two towns, that when the company arrived from the South they would direct their steps to Newport, a large and thriving place, before visiting Providence, a town scarcely half as populous.⁶

The fact that theatre began early on in Newport is not surprising for a few reasons. First of all, from the beginning, Newport was more liberal than the other New England colonies. The Puritan attitude had not the same hold in Newport that it had over its neighbors. Secondly, Roger Williams's founding of Rhode Island on the basis of freedom of religion had longstanding effects. Additionally, the presence of about sixty Jewish families in Newport during the mid-eighteenth century, many of whom had sought religious freedom in Rhode Island, promoted a liberal patronage for the actors.⁷ The Jewish community in **Newport**, although small at the time, was dedicated in its support of the theatre.

How long the Douglass players remained in Newport is **unknown**, since two years later (1763) David **Douglass**, using his political and business acumen, went on to organize his acting troupe into The American Company, the most famous and long-lived troupe of traveling professional actors in early U.S. theatre history.⁸ There appears to be no recorded

history of theatre existing in Newport after Douglass until the year 1793. In the intervening years, it seems unlikely, however, that actors would simply forget about the place which accepted them and had directly contributed to their livelihood. It appears logical to expect that theatre would not disappear altogether from a town which early on was receptive to the world of the performer. It is plausible to assume that the Douglass troupe in particular, although most of the original players had dispersed by this time, may even have spread the word about Newport in this regard.

Whatever type of theatre, if any, existed in Newport after Douglass, theatre of a more stable nature came in the form of a rented structure called the Brick Market Place. The earliest record of a playhouse there first appears in 1793 when Messrs. J. Harper & A. Placide, from Boston, leased the upper part of the building "remodeling a linle" and opening it as a theatre on the evening of Monday, 24 June 1793 with the presentation of *Jane Shore*. The General Assembly allowed theatrical performances in Newport with the understanding that they were to be under the supervision of the town council.⁹ During the weeks to follow the theatre's opening in June, the repertoire included such works as the ballad, *The Old Soldier* and *Robinson Crusoe*, in pantomime "a Favourite Comedy (as performed in Boston...)" *Barnaby Rattle*, and Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*. As was the custom, the evening concluded with a comic opera called *Rosina* or *The Reapers*.¹⁰ Another example is the evening of 22 August which opened with Moliere's *The Miser* and ended with a musical entertainment called *The Padlock*.¹¹ Other representative works under Placide's management included *Hamlet. Prince of Denmark*, a pantomime entertainment called *Harlequin Skeleton* and *King Richard. the Third*, which was delivered "in a historical recitation style,...." and was claimed to be a first time production in Newpon. In addition,

listed among the performances were a wheelbarrow tight rope act and a musical entertainment written by David Garrick called *The Merry Shepherd* or *Lineo's Travels*, also "never performed previously [in Newport]."¹² From all appearances, Placide's repertoire for the Brick Market appears to duplicate the contemporary English theatre with pretty much the same plays, more than likely the same acting styles, and from all indication the same arrangement of stage space.

The Brick Market, one of Newport's early extant buildings played an important role in the history of theatre in Newport. The land where the Brick Market Place still stands was purchased in 1760 by the proprietors of Long Wharf. This group of merchants "made a grant [of this land] to the town of Newport" for a market place to be built there. A committee was formed which appointed the well known architect, Peter Harrison. Harrison had previously designed the Redwood Library (1747), the Newport Touro Synagogue (1762), and Boston's King's Chapel. Some now believe that the Brick Market Place is the finest example of his work. The Brick Market was intended as a granary, but was never used as such. It was built by town lotteries granted for this purpose by the general assembly. There were three stories. The lower part was made for a market house, a style copied from the English market house then in existence. The rear part of the lower floor was a watch-house. The second and third floors were divided into stores for dry goods and offices to be rented.¹³ Immediately following the American Revolution, however, the upper stories were used only as a printing office. In a monograph entitled *Report on The Old Brick Market. or Old City Hall. Newport. Rhode Island* Nonnan Morrison Isham notes that

in 1793 the second and third stories must have been seriously altered when Harper & Placide leased the upper part for a theatre. The entrance seems to have

remained in the center. The third floor may have been taken out entirely or it may have been changed into a gallery. We cannot now decide which.¹⁴

Alexander Placide leased the theatre for six years from 1793 to 1799. In 1795, while it was still Placide's theatre, the Boston Company of Comedians under its manager, a Mr. Powell, performed at the Brick Market Theatre.¹⁵ However, after 1799, when Placide's lease expired, there appears to be no known record of any lease renewal.

It was formerly believed that the title "Theatre . . . Newport" was post-Alexander Placide. However, amidst lotteries, auctions, proxy tickets and Whig tickets which are housed at the Newport Historical Society is a theatre program of the play *Barbarossa. Tyrant of Algiers* dated 29 May, 1794 and "presented at Theatre . . . Newport." This was the name thought to have been given to a later Brick Market Theatre. However, the *Barbarossa* playbill would appear to confirm that, as early as Placide's time, Theatre . . . Newport was already designated as such and not later as once thought.¹⁶

Evidence from a print housed at the Newport Historical Society verifies that the Brick Market was being used as a theatre in 1831. This most likely was the Newport Stage Company also called Theatre . . . Newport since the Stage Company has always been the name associated with Theatre . . . Newport. Between 1799 (post Placide) and 1831 little has been preserved to help settle this for certain. It is known, however, that in 1842 the building was altered for a town hall at the cost of 2,000 dollars. In its "History of the Structure of the Old City Hall" the Chamber of Commerce records that

The third floor was removed and the second converted into one large room, 60 ft. long, 28 ft. wide, 18 ft. high, with a gallery on three sides. Five hundred people could be accommodated there. The arches were fitted with windows or doors and used

for stores.¹⁷

When considering the life of the building itself, Brick Market Place has had a varied history. Although today the building has the new purpose, The Museum of Newport History, it is still commonly known as Brick Market.¹⁸ The Brick Market House is still considered one of the finest colonial structures on the Atlantic coast.

The theatrical offerings at Theatre . . . Newport during the early nineteenth century, appeared to be rich and engaging, although they duplicated European choices, especially English. Represented among the varied works were the staging of romantic dramas, which in many instances, were followed by musical farces. A variety of choices existed. Among them were Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1817); a full-length celebrated musical drama (*Guy Mannering-in* 3 acts, n.d.); (Lillo's *The London Merchant*, 16 August 1801); extravaganza burlettas (*Tom and Jerry*); and dramas played with full orchestras. There was at least one benefit for J. H. Kirby which mentions private boxes at \$5, but no date.¹⁹ Theatre . . . Newport also produced Goethe's Opera, *Faust*, I and II, and Restoration playwright Susan Centlivre's *The Busy Body*.²⁰ There were various premieres. One premiere headlined Mrs. Mary Ann Duff from the Philadelphia and Baltimore theatres who played Ophelia (11 August 1817) which mentions boxes, pit and gallery prices at \$1.00, 50 cents and 25 cents respectively.²¹ Some theatre broadsides dating from various collections of the early nineteenth century include accurate dates of productions and cast lists. From the repeated appearances of certain actors, Theatre...Newport seems to have had a fairly stable repertory. The old Brick Market Place continued to be referred to as Theatre... Newport, and is the earliest structure in the city where a configuration of formal theatre took place.

The Newport Opera House is another important location of theatre which should not

be overlooked when considering Newport's early theatre history. Appearing later than the Brick Market Theatre yet earlier than the Casino, Shanahan's, an earlier name which was later dropped, Opera House stands out in that it was built to be a theatre from the start.²² In all respects it was a first class hall, "seated 1,000, had parquette floors, a gallery, orchestra and four proscenium boxes, three stage traps, ample dressing rooms, and a complete outfit of 'first class' scenery. The stage is 55 x 45 ft. and is on a level with the street.,,23 Although it now functions exclusively as a movie theatre, today seating only 400, the building and site are original, the building having been modernized circa 1830 as the one we know today. This was Newport's only opera house. Opera did take place at Shanahan's. According to an 1877 Playbill, the *Sacred Opera of Esther* was performed "in full Median, Persian and Jewish Costumes."²⁴ The House was used year round for various activities and not limited to theatrical entertainment.

Located in the heart of the city, in many instances, the Opera House was used for activities other than theatre. For example, it was host to pre-parade exercises, exhibitions and July Fourth and Memorial Day celebrations, sermons on the American Revolution (1877), funeral processions of Revolutionary officers and dignitaries and post-Civil War minstrels.¹⁵ Situated close to Newport Harbor, the Opera House formerly played a significant role in naval exhibitions, often participating in the order of exercises associated with the line of ships-of-war in Newport Harbor.²⁶

A whole stream of patriotic plays was presented, as well. For example, in July, 1873, *The Drummer Boy* could be seen with general admission 50 cents, reserved seats for 75 cents and gallery seats at 35 cents.¹⁷ Various kinds of lectures were customarily conducted at the Newport Opera House and spectacles as magic and mystery matinees were

given for children. Also, the Newport Choral Society performed a number of times there. Among the many playbills of the Choral Society housed at the Newport Historical Society, one was dated 24 May 1877. Humorous and dramatic readings were high on the entertainment Listings.²⁸ Characteristic of the opera houses in the United States, vaudeville was a staple at Shanahan's. Dramas were also performed. A broadside which is housed at the Newport Historical Society dated 13 Feb. 1888 indicates that the dramas *Lucretia Borgia* and *The Country Cousin* were presented at Shanahan's. It seems reasonable to expect that other plays were also presented.

It is ironic that even today the Opera House shares in the popular cultural life of Newport, while the Newport Casino Theatre is silent after a prestigious theatrical career. On 10 December 1997, the Opera House was one of two choices for the world public premiere of Steven Spielberg's film *Amistad*.²⁹ The Opera House glistened that evening during the pre-screening festivities. It seemed to reclaim its footing in the long tradition as Newport's home for popular entertainment. Since 1998, the Opera House has been engaged by the Newport International Film Festival which takes place during the first week in June. There is an extensive plan, which is still in the design stages, to restore the theatre into a fully equipped opera house.

Next door to the Opera House was the Perry House built circa 1853. This was a guest house which boarded actors while they performed at the Opera House. Oral tradition exists that costumes and certain stage properties were housed on the premises. Whether anything related to performances was ever held at the Perry House is still uncertain even though it is probable that smaller productions could have been staged, or it may have accommodated rehearsal space.

Another structure with significant cultural connections to middle-nineteenth-century Newport is the present Jane Pickens Theatre. In brief, the building went from being an Episcopal Church in 1834 to a Roman Catholic Church to the Strand Theatre in 1907 and finally to the Jane Pickens Theatre of today.³⁰ A privately owned building from the beginning, its life has been divided between religion and art, a singular combination. Erected in 1834 as Zion Church (Episcopal), the original structure is a three storied red brick with wooden detail. Its principle architectural style is classical Greek revival. The entrance has "multiple, many-paned wood and glass in wooden frame with pilasters, panels and rosettes."³¹ In 1885, the building became Roman Catholic St. Joseph Church, before the church's permanent home became Mann Avenue at Broadway.

Shortly after the turn of the century, circa 1907, the building was converted into the Strand Theatre, a commercial movie house.³² Similar to the Opera House, the Strand had a steady theatrical fare ranging from dramatic readings to magic shows. Bills as dissimilar as the Newport Symphony Orchestra that performed its first concert there on 4 November 1923 and vaudeville acts had equal billing. Nicknamed "The Match Box" because of its tiny size, the Strand Theatre remains a place of beauty; and even though it cannot claim the long history of the Opera House as a strong location of theatre, it has always been a popular choice of enjoyment by out-of-towners as well as by the locals. In the late 1970's the theatre was changed again. Only this time it became the highly regarded Jane Pickens Theatre, a film art house. Due to financial strain, the theatre closed in 1995; however, a few months later it reopened as a few wealthy Bellevue Avenue residents decided to support it. Without a substantial subsidy, the Jane Pickens could never afford to show the type of films which it does for any profit. Like the Strand earlier, it is not unusual to see celebrities on the

premises of the Jane Pickens.³³

When assessing the theatrical picture of Newport, especially during the nineteenth and well into the early twentieth century, one needs to credit other sporadic records of scattered amateur and professional performances occurring throughout the city. Many of these were spaces of lesser known historical and cultural benefit to the city other than those previously mentioned. Nonetheless, each helps to fill out the more complete theatrical picture of Newport. Five that stand out in their contributions are two societies, two clubs, and an acting troupe. Amidst its many performances throughout the city of Newport, the Philharmonic Society performed on 12 February 1857 at Aquidneck Hall. The Society rendered *Handel's Messiah* at the Presbyterian Church located at Broadway and Everett Street on 20 Jan 1898. It conducted Mendelssohn's *Saint Paul* at the First Presbyterian Church on String Street on 18 May 1899.³⁴ This is one group which has received little attention. In 1898 the Philharmonic began an associate membership offering attendance at rehearsals for \$5.00. It is not clear whether the Philharmonic later became the Newport Philharmonic Society, which appears in 1916 and again five years later with "the usual course of four concerts for the season of 1920-1921...,"³⁵

Another catalyst of culture, the Unity Club, was organized in 1881 as a literary and social society embracing men and women of all denominations. It was connected mainly with the Channing Memorial Church located on 135 Pelham Street. The club sponsored a number of dramatic readings including *Cyrano De Bergerac* on Tuesday evening of 14 Feb. 1911. Another, the Euterpe Club, concerts appearing in 1891 at the Masonic Hall still existed into the 1930s. The Ben Greet Players, the original English (Everyman) Company, sponsored by Charles Frohman, conducted outdoor performances in Newport under the

auspices of the Cloyne House School, a private school for young men, and also for the benefit of the Army & Navy Club, Branch of International YM.CA.^{J6} According to two broadsides housed at the Newport Historical Society dated 28 and 29 June (n. year), both matinee and evening performances of the acting group, at least in June, were entirely works of Shakespeare.^{J7} Finally, The Society of Friends, established in Newport since 1643, after occupying various places throughout the city, built its new foundation in the year 1700 on Marlborough Street (corner of Tanner Street). Over the years the building received various enlargements, finally seating about 1500. However, during the 1920s, the Quakers, because of dwindling numbers, abandoned the building, leasing it to the city. It quickly became Newport's Community Center Playhouse where the Newport Players Guild, a local group, later associated with the Newport Casino Theatre during winters, performed for many years, closing its twentieth season in 1958 with the production of Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*.³⁵ However, just as quickly as the Quakers left Newport, they returned in 1995 to use it again that summer where they staged original historical plays authored by Newport and Portsmouth women residents.

In addition to the spaces recognized as designated theatrical venues, benefits were given in the city by accomplished actors. Charlene Cushman (1816-1876), an internationally recognized actor, gave public readings to raise money for the Newport Hospital. On the evening of 21 August 1872, for example, she performed before one of the largest audiences ever assembled at the Newport Opera House. On the occasion of the benefit, it was suggested by a "wealthy fashionable summer resident" that Cushman give the reading at the resident's house. Cushman declined "on the ground that as she was reading for the benefit of the people of Newport, she professed to do so in a place to which they

might more freely come; and she therefore gave it in the town itself" In her biography, the editor and lifelong friend of Cushman, Emma Stebbins, records

It was one of those wonderful evenings of which Newport only is capable: a sunset of unexampled glory illuminated the sea and touched with points of fire the distant buildings and the nearer islands;... 39

These early theatre ventures in which arts and entertainment were much more inclusive of the ordinary Newport citizen were contrasted later by the Newport Casino Theatre which was exclusive from its beginning days in 1881.

Although the early theatrical history of Newport lay the foundation for much of its cultural inheritance, the acme of Newport's cultural life was yet to be seen. From the advent of its wealthy merchants during the eighteenth century, Newport had noticeably advanced in the economic and intellectual arenas. It was not long, however, before Newport moved from a haven for merchant-artists and intellectuals to one for the fabulously wealthy. The distinct social group that was rising alongside the Newport merchants during the mid-nineteenth century was the property-owning-privileged-class. Due to their influences, the blend of cosmopolitanism and wealth would characterize all of Newport in a later period called the Gilded Age.

Although the Gilded Age in Newport is formally placed within the years 1880 and 1920, the opulent lifestyle extended before and after these boundaries. The post-Civil War summer colonists would succeed in transfiguring the theatrical picture of Newport through the vehicle of the Casino Theatre. The gracious life for which Newport was to be famous was fast approaching. Before the Civil War, the Southern plantation owners frequented Newport. However, their Newport sojourn was ended by the War, and they did not return.

They were replaced in the 1870s by the wealthy from Boston, Philadelphia and New York. The new wealthy summer visitors were already discovering the Newport that would become a center of charm, culture and sophistication. At the center of this prosperity was the Newport Casino Theatre.

CHAPTER ONE

THE CASINO BALLROOM THEATRE 1881-1902

In order to appreciate the impact of the Casino, it is important to begin in the Newport of the 1840s and 1850s when Newport was reestablishing itself as a summer resort after years of restructuring following the devastation of the Revolutionary War period. Newport's climate continued to draw wealthy families from the south, who joined with the "first families" of Philadelphia, New York, Providence and Boston. The area in which they chose to live was "on the hill near and east of or behind the Redwood Library, and spread along Kay and Catherine Streets and Old Beach Road down to Easton's Pond.,¹

This residential area at first was dominated by large estates housing the Southern gentry. During the post-Civil War years, however, Southern families failed to return to Newport but the city continued to develop largely due to land speculation which opened up large tracts for subdivision and sale. The first of this subdivision was the Kay-Catherine-Old Beach area where, during the 1870s, many of the elite of the nation built cottages and made Newport their summer retreat. In this post-Civil War era Newport became the premier "cottage resort." Nearly a decade prior to the Casino's inception, these new summer cottages attested to the upwardly mobile flow of wealth and good taste populating Newport. The socially conscious were building their resort homes, and the popularization of the "suburban villa" would transform Newport, leaving a distinct impact² When the Casino was built in 1880 and for about five decades following, the powerfully rich and influential would claim

the Newport Casino as their own and enjoy the multidimensional offerings it afforded.

In an environment inhabited by the **rich**, the Casino at Newport, which essentially consisted of court and lawn tennis, a restaurant, a private club and a theatre-ballroom begun as a resounding success story. During the 1880s, the ballroom theatre sponsored multifaceted forms of entertainment including gala balls, dances and varied artistic performances both amateur and professional before it was formally transformed into a legitimate summer theatre in 1927. Several forces, including the founder, the architects and the stockholders, came together at the time of the Casino's conception, in 1880, which resulted in a successful creation followed by years of sustained growth. A primary force was James Gordon Bennett, owner of the *New York Herald*. A man of immense wealth, influence and business experience, Bennett was intent on building a "better playpen" than anything Newport had ever experienced. In 1879, Bennett commissioned the foremost architectural firm of the day, McKim, Mead & White, to implement his idea. His intention was to form a complex which the wealthy summer colony would frequent and consider more fashionable than any other establishment. He succeeded in building an unparalleled complex known as the Newport Casino. The design, the architecture, and the landscape was a peerless contributor to an era of opulence and **luxury** in Newport.

The driving force behind the Casino **project**, with the influence and means to hire the talent to make his creation work, was the flamboyant pacesetter and sports enthusiast, the **aforementioned**, James Gordon Bennett. He was born in New York on 10 May 1841. His father was James Bennett, Sr., a pioneer journalist and founder and editor of the *New York Herald*,³ who married a woman from the west of Ireland, Henrietta Agnes Crean. The couple had five children, three of whom died very young. The stress of this, along with the

rough-and-tumble life of Mr. Bennett's newspaper, put a strain on the marriage. The Bennetts did not legally separate but worked out an arrangement in which they lived separate lives on two continents. Bennett senior stayed mainly in New York, absorbed in the life of the *Herald*, while Mrs. Bennett and her surviving son and daughter lived in France.⁴ James Jr. grew up learning and appreciating sophisticated continental values and style. He went to the best private schools, while Henrietta Bennett devoted her efforts and hours to climbing the ladder of French society.^s Bennett's childhood proved to be a superior training ground for what would nurture an independent spirit, matched with a determined personality.

As an adult, when Bennett was not on whirlwind tours throughout Europe, he lived much of the time in New York. At twenty-five, after winning a transatlantic yachting race in December 1866 (wagered under the influence of alcohol at the Union Club in New York one October evening of that year), a change occurred in him. The whole event, and particularly its outcome, seems to have served as a turning point in Bennett's life.⁶ He returned to New York with the outward signs of maturity and a stature which manifested signs of future success. Bennett senior recognized the transformation and, two years later upon his own retirement from the *New York Herald* at seventy-one, turned over the control of the newspaper to his son. At twenty-seven, James Bennett had inherited not only the responsibilities of the *Herald* but also its inexhaustible income, both of which gave him an early exposure to substantial business transactions generating the knowledge he would later use to advantage. While managing the *Herald*, Bennett showed a profound attraction for the wealthy. Whereas his father had been cognizant of the ordinary person, mindful of the fact that this was the main reader of his newspaper, Bennett Jr. was arrogant and insensitive to

the ordinary citizen. The new proprietor instructed his newspaper staff to be particularly accommodating toward those who had wealth or a title. From the **beginning**, Bennett displayed a preference for those of privilege.

Mainly through his global experience and astute vision, Bennett soon made the *New York Herald* the leading newspaper of the day. To do this, he employed the Atlantic cable, an insulated telegraph cable stretching from Newfoundland to Ireland along the ocean floor, to widen his newspaper's horizons and encourage Americans to take an interest in European affairs.⁷ He was the first American editor of a newspaper--largely perhaps, because of his upbringing and education abroad--to explore the international scene in any detail. He sought specialists of all kinds to inflate his newspaper. As owner and editor of the *Herald*, Bennett employed as contributors or staff members at one time or another names as Mark Twain, Walt Whitman, Charles Edward Russell, Charles Nordhoff, Robert Hunt Lyman and Stephen Crane.⁸ Always in search for the novel or inventive, particularly in Europe, he engaged a number of leading German writers to cover the Wagnerian concerts at Bayreuth.⁹ Bennett was in a position not only to know where the "news" was but also to be able to go there or appoint someone else to be present to observe and write about it. By now, he was ensconced in the world of plenty and had the leisure and style to travel to Bayreuth and witness Wagner's Festivals first hand.¹⁰ The fact that Bennett would even have covered these events further demonstrates sophistication and professional instinct. Bennett was always pushing the borders of experience to test the untried. Cosmopolitan by nature and nurture, he appreciated worldly things and embraced the good they had to offer. The second owner and editor of the country's leading newspaper of the day, like his father before him, was at the threshold of his own noteworthy accomplishment.

Bennett's personal style, a change in the commercial location in Newport, as well as a well documented social mistake allowed the Casino plan to materialize. Bennett was a man of impulse and adventure whose scheduled life was a stir of activities. His reactionary nature may have propelled the actualization of the Casino at Newport since behind many of his enterprises was an impulse born out of a dissatisfaction with existing conditions.¹¹ In part, his rawboned determination spurred the occasion of the Newport Casino. Bennett was upset over an incident at the exclusive Newport Reading Room on Bellevue Avenue.¹² He threatened to outrun the fraternity by building an impressive, competitive playground when he was embarrassed by the club members' reprimand for the outrageous behavior of his friend Captain John "Sugar" Candy, a famous British polo player.¹³ The story is recorded that on a dare by Bennett, Candy in an attempt to prove his "sportsmanship" rode his favorite horse onto the porch of the Newport Reading Room where some of the members were relaxing. The episode not only demolished the entrance hall but also infuriated the more conservative members of what was then the most exclusive men's club in the country. Consequently, Candy's guest invitation was recalled and Bennett admonished. Stung by the Reading Room Occurrence and angered by the treatment of his friend, James Bennett resigned as a member and fastened his attention on building an alternate choice to the Newport reading room.

To this end in 1879, Bennett purchased the Sidney Brooks Estate, "Stone Villa," on Bellevue Avenue and made it his home for the few summers he returned to Newport.¹⁴ In addition, he purchased an empty lot across from his estate on which to build his Casino. Bennett's Casino property was adjacent to the commercial Travers Block which had been built between 1871 and 1873. During the early 1870s, the Travers Block on Bellevue

Avenue was to play a key role in Newport because it marked for the first time in the city's history an additional shopping area which was patronized almost exclusively by the wealthy. The erection of the Travers Block of shops and offices during the third quarter of the nineteenth century expanded the commercial complexion of Newport. The Travers block and the Casino's International Tennis Hall of Fame remain today as both an outstanding commercial and entertainment center of Newport.

James Bennett's previous business and worldly experience gave him an advantage in recognizing the signals of future development. As Bellevue Avenue North was becoming the new, albeit restricted, commercial scene of Newport, the nearby resort "cottages" built in the area by the ultra-wealthy had appeared in the nearby Kay-Catherine-Old Beach Road area.^[5] It was no accident that Bennett purchased land and built his new establishment on the Avenue. This, along with the understanding of expansion afforded by his experience with the development of the *Herald* on the international market, would have alerted Bennett to a prime investment. Bennett's intended Casino would contribute to the new look of Newport while making a profit in the process. In the third quarter of the nineteenth century, James Gordon Bennett founded a rival social club to the Newport Reading Room whose scope of activities far exceeded the staid atmosphere of the Reading Room.

Bennett played the primary role in the Casino's creation, but other distinguished people were involved in placing the club at the forefront of Newport society. Foremost among these were the architects, Charles Fallen McKim, Thomas Mead and Stanford White. In the late 1870s, initially through Charles McKim, Bennett had fanned what was to be a "famous and enduring partnership" which would prompt him to commission the "fledgling firm to design his club." During the early 1880s McKim, Mead & White was to

accomplish one of their more inventive and distinguished works. The firm's first masterpiece in Newport was the Casino built between 1879 and 1881:

The Newport Casino really answered the need for a social center which had arisen with the great expansion of the summer colony. It is the first of those suburban and resort country clubs which were a new feature in the 1880s and of which McKim, Mead and White soon built other examples-those at Short Hills, New Jersey, and Narragansett Pier. Since the site of the Newport Casino was next to the Travers Block near the heart of an exclusive summer shopping center, McKim kept the street facade unobtrusive and simple. |C>

While retaining originality and quality of purpose for the Casino establishment, the aim was to synthesize the general outline of the neighboring structures.

The complex was called the Newport Casino, not because there was to be gambling-there was not-but because the design was like that of two structures called in Italian "caseina," an Italian farmstead or a "little house." During the eighteenth century, casinos were built in the gardens of country estates, providing their elite owners with places for recreation and amusing pastimes. The interior courtyard of the Newport Casino looked very much like the plan of an Italian farmstead, but the uses to which the Casino would be put were those for which small buildings, much like gazebos, began to be used in the late nineteenth century.¹⁷

The Casino, which exemplified the foremost important shingled work in America at the time, was a counterbalance to the gilded shapes and curves imitative of European features. The shingle style was an American design which was popular in resorts. Architecturally associated with the early 1880s, it used wood very effectively. The building emphasized natural material which resulted in a distinctive exterior, basically **shingled**.

Good design, simplicity and craftsmanship, the trademark of some of the new design artists, appealed to the Newport summer colonists in an era that was marked by mass production. Firms such as McKim, Mead and White were greatly sought after by those with the resources to pay for the implementation of the new architectural ideas. Through the construction of the Newport Casino, the New York firm "had developed a design for an entirely new type of social and recreational club having no American architectural precedent and only one possible precursor in England."¹⁹ In 1880, there were few cottages with large ballrooms in Newport. Consequently, White's design incorporated one in the Casino that was needed and appreciated. Thus, with the appearance of the Newport Casino, the wealthy happily congregated because they finally had a place of their own.

Stanford White, the youngest of the firm's three partners, was emerging as a figure of artistic taste and talent. White is the "most identifiable and memorable" of the McKim firm and his name is "particularly associated with the design of the new club because his specialty was surface ornamentation."¹⁹ According to White's great-granddaughter, Suzannah Lessard, many believed that "before he was thirty, White was on his way to becoming the most famous architect in America." Lessard identifies the early years as being seminal years for him, and for McKim, Mead & White, too: "in those years the firm designed many palazzi in and out of New York City for the burgeoning Gilded Age and became one of the most successful and influential architectural firms in the country. The working style of the firm was collaborative. No one project came from anyone hand."²⁰ Stanford White, however, left his singular imprint on the creation of the Casino.

In this recent biography on Stanford White, Lessard pieces together the memory and meaning of her family's history. Lessard writes of White's collaboration with the McKim and

Mead learn. She reflects that the Newport Casino marks "the purest sense of art which Stanford White created." The author further states that "as White's life became more complicated in the social entanglements and scandals which assailed him, his work became more grand and monstrous." She believes that White began to define space for a sense of power and no longer for the pure artistic construction, as for the sake of creating something simply for itself.²¹ As White's personal life worsened, the artist lost his proclivity to create simply for the grandeur of an artistic expression, a model of which the Newport Casino clearly embodies.

Designed by White, the Casino's ballroom theatre interior is "joined to the tennis building by a connecting piazza." Social historian, Alan Shurnacher, called the building an "architectural masterpiece serving both as a five-hundred capacity, removable-seat theatre and also as a ballroom for dances.!!!! Its plain wooden shingle and trim exterior barely hints at the exquisite plaster and gilt interior, indicating how White excelled at interior decoration. Shumacher describes lithe color scheme for the well-proportioned interior [as] gold-trimmed ivory with the ceiling painted to look like a blue sky powdered with golden stars. Attached were dressing rooms and a kitchen for light refreshments.!!D The interior has a beautiful parquet floor which provides an area for dancing and includes a stage twenty-five feet square. In their study entitled *The Architectural Heritage of Newport. RI* Antoinette Downing and Vincent Scully describe the theatre's interior:

A shallow balcony at the rear holds 3 additional rows and the graceful, arched boxes adorning either side of the upper level contain about 10 moveable chairs each. Beneath these side boxes are shallow rooms flanking the auditorium, the further Side devoted to storage, the Northern side housing the entrance lobby, powder rooms, ticket office and stairs to the

upper porch.²⁴

As can be observed in an early photo housed in the Newport Historical Society's archives, the pillars supporting the boxes, with their partially hidden motifs, give rise to the conjecture that certain details on the auditorium walls may be an addition along with the crystal lights. The beauty of the room in its plan, its proportions, its decor and its superb acoustics all attest to Stanford White's imagination.

The rectangular theatre's exterior is "shingled in dark brown in an attempt to copy the rectangular tiles popular in England in 1880." A porch runs along the Northern side and across the Western end where delicate lattice work connects it with the rest of the Casino club complex "both artistically and concretely." The lattice-like porch frame at the Newport Casino reflects early oriental influence on American architecture. Stanford White was impressed by the decorative screens at the Japanese Pavilion at the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876,²⁵ and his admiration is ostensibly visible in his new creation at Newport.

Among the bidders for construction, many of whom were from New York and Boston, Nathan Barker, a local contractor, was awarded the contract for most of the Casino buildings by McKim, Mead & White. In her report *A Physical History of the Newport Casino* Cecelia G. Manning states that Barker's appointment employed 300 to 400 men from the city.²⁶ This proved to be a boon for the natives as the project provided employment for the local carpenters. The detail given to the theatre is noteworthy. Above the delicate plaster work ceiling are six massive trusses forty-one feet in length which support the theatre roof over the auditorium. These were "raised and placed in position by means of span shears, manipulated by James Logan, the veteran rigger.,²⁷ An entry in

McKim Mead and White's *Bill Book*, housed at the Avery Library in New York, under "Drawings", Walker O. Cain Gift, .000031, records that \$2,825.00 was spent on the theatre. It seems likely that this was the cost of decoration, rather than construction, since the Casino Governors had stipulated the previous September that the theatre decoration was not to exceed \$3,000.⁸

The Newport Casino opened in 1880 as the most complete resort facility in America, the first one of its kind in the United States. Six months from the start of construction, the Casino resort opened on 26 July without much fanfare. At this formal dedication, the Newport Casino received its first guests between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. Bennett sold subscriptions to the small gathering invited for a private showing. The only evidence that something out of the ordinary was happening, according to local historian, Leonard Panaggio, was the "increased number of coaches seen in the vicinity which amounted to a forerunner of Newport's traffic jams today." In his article entitled "What the Casino was Like When it Opened," Panaggio recounts: "Horse-drawn vehicles filled the area from the southern boundary of the Casino and Ocean House [hotel] properties at East Bowery Street north to Touro Park.,²⁹ The *Newport* newspapers covered the Casino's private opening the following night on 27 July.^{JO}

The fact that the Newport Casino opened with a private showing is consistent with Bennett's disposition. A free thinker and a mobilizer, he had a clear idea of what he intended for his club, and whom he chose as patrons. On the actual day of the Casino's official opening on 26 July, Bennett had in hand an extensive guest list of names which read as a "Who's Who" of Newport's New York society. He already had in mind those he thought could serve as underwriters and be in a position to enjoy and govern the ne\

establishment.³¹ Bennett believed that subscriptions were an essential component to making a success of his select club, and he wasted no time in initiating this aspect of his project. One week later, the Casino governors invited the citizens of Newport to a reception on the Casino grounds. "The visitors numbered probably two or three thousand." Refreshments were served while Lander's orchestra furnished the music.³² Bennett, who could create news as well as record it, possessed the good mix of determination and know-how which succeeded in pressing his project to completion.

Bennett fronted the investment for the construction of the Casino, as the work began in January, 1880. The original cost of construction agreed to was \$64,100.00, with the entire complex of structures to be built in six months. The actual cost overrun amounted to a total of about \$120,000.00.³³ In order to finance the Casino project, Bennett issued shares of stocks not to exceed two shares per person. During the first six months of the Casino's existence (July 1880 to January 1881), stock sales did not generate enough capital so Bennett allowed additional shares to be sold but limited the number of votes allowed each shareholder, regardless of the number of stocks he owned, to two votes.³⁴ The arrangement enabled Bennett to maintain control; Bennett held about thirty shares at the time of his death in Paris in 1923.

The Casino was not just Bennett's. He was the genius behind it, but without the support and devoted efforts of some of the most powerful individuals in America at that time, it would not have reached the heights of success which it did. Bennett needed the wealthy to finance it with him. Therefore, it was not a situation of "Bennett and them" but rather of Bennett orchestrating the type of money available while convincing others of his own persuasion to venture capital for gain. Bennett was surrounded by his own milieu

through the association with such names as Oliver Hazard Perry Belmont, Cornelius Vanderbilt, John Jacob Astor, and Alexander Agassiz, to name a few.

Bennett had a change of heart for practical reasons and allowed the ordinary people of Newport also to enjoy the club despite opposition from a number of wealthy patrons. Ultimately, this decision to include the public was purely financial. Some friction arose over policy and the *Newport Mercury* aired both sides of the story. A tension existed between how much of the Casino complex was to be opened to Newporters vis a vis the founding philosophy governing its use. The controversy continued without the influence of Bennett as he was rarely in the area. Even though the Casino advertised that the public was welcome, because of the governing rules laid down by the members, all of whom were from the wealthy class, the club continued to remain elite.

The Casino had its own constitution, board of governors, elected officers and shareholders. The members still retained exclusive privileges while strict guidelines remained for the ordinary others who hoped to experience the pleasure which the Casino had to offer. The by-laws state that no person should be admitted to the Casino "unless he or she is a pennant member or subscriber, or introduced by the Executive Committee." The Governing committee admitted persons by ballot, and two negative votes would exclude someone permanently. Consequently, the structure would not even allow the opportunity to present itself for admittance of the ordinary person because all rights were reserved only for the summer colonists. The members paid \$25 each per year. Subscribers paid, for the season, \$25; for one month, \$15; for two weeks, \$10; for one week, \$5; and for three days \$2.50. Members, subscribers and their families were admitted to activities. Thus, Newporters could use the Casino Theatre through day passes but were really kept from truly

It belonging." Full participation In the life of the Casino was limited to the wealthy "outsiders," the summer residents.

Bennett was one among a select few in Newport during the late 1870s who recognized that the notion of public building could be realized through private means. This was his plan in creating the Newport Casino. It might be said that through its patron, James Gordon Bennett gave to the wealthy a link to the amenities of Europe. The Casino filled a need that cottagers were feeling for some time, both for a place to congregate and for a social and recreational space they could call their own. Built for America's firsts, the Newport Casino became the single gathering spot for the summer colonists "other than their own yacht or some one else's yacht."³⁵ The Casino also gave the colonists an outlet wherein they could simply show up spontaneously at a place without the inconvenience of a formal invitation or announcement which was very much the rule in high-fashioned Newport.

If the seeds of culture thrive on wealth, then in no better way is this exemplified than in the Newport Casino of the nineteenth century. From the start, the Casino immediately became one of the prominent places on the distinguished Newport schedule. Shielded by foliage, the place was a private paradise incorporated by a group of the summer colony which conducted it from that time for various events, the principal one being tennis. The Casino followed a trend begun in New York by providing luxurious dining,³⁶ The Casino had tennis courts, flower beds amidst a popular walkway called the "serpentine path," broad lawns with a magnificent spray fountain, wide piazzas, bachelors' apartments, archery, a bowling alley, billiard hall, reading rooms and a theatre-ballroom building. Of all the descriptions of the Newport Casino, Suzannah Lessard's picture is one of fondness and personal memory. She knows it best as "a shingled complex of buildings which is cozy and

elegant at the same time. A deep, arched entranceway, dark and medieval in feeling, leads into an interlocking series of spaces, full of green grass and light, where the textures of the enclosing shingled walls are varied, and a variety of towers and window styles adds to the picturesque effect.¹³⁷ The summer colony whose identity links the institution with prestige and grandeur became rooted in Newport and identified with the Newport Casino. They had chosen it as their personal place of recreation. From its inception, the Newport Casino charmed the summer visitor with its recreational and social activities.

The Casino ballroom theatre came into being six months after the Casino complex opened. Much of the building's original decoration, including golden designs on the walls and on the front of the upper boxes, remain as Stanford White created them. Located at the back of the property, the ballroom theatre is considered the Casino's most distinguished architectural achievement. Double doors lead into wide piazzas making it possible to view the entire Casino complex. While in the planning stages, Bennett had expressed a desire for three things: court and lawn tennis, a restaurant and a theatre.³⁸ The latter was to be an assembly hall- "a building which w[ould] contain a model opera house." The result was the Casino Theatre which is considered one of the earliest examples of Stanford White's talent, that went far beyond an assembly hall complex.

The Casino began improvements to enhance its appearance soon after its original construction. The deep early interest shows its good care by the 'gentlemen of leisure' who did not hesitate to devote a large measure of their time to looking after the interests of their fashionable institution. Their social position and extensive travels gave them an opportunity to observe what was needed and desired and how to secure it. During the winter and spring of 1881, extensive adjustments were still being made to the Casino block and to the

building itself to ready it for the formal opening season which began in June of that year. The tasteful buildings and handsome grounds under the supervision of Manager Harrington were undergoing adjustments.³⁹ Among a list of completed buildings in the Casino compound, from plans drawn up by McKim, Meade & White, were the bachelor apartments being changed into club rooms with the introduction of steam and a conversational room 25 by 30 feet, with an open verandah in front. The first story was converted into two reading rooms, each measuring 16 by 45 feet. These alterations, along with some minor improvements, had the entire expenditure aggregating to about \$15,000.⁴⁰

The theatre was considered "unusually attractive and even outstanding." In the beginning, it was used mainly for dances (the chairs being removed from the main auditorium, clearing the floor for dancing) with the orchestra on the stage and the galleries for the spectators. It also hosted amateur and professional plays, tableaux, and concerts.⁴¹ White's concept of a good use of space resulted in the theatre doubling as a ballroom which gave it a flexibility of purpose.

Between 1881 and 1889, the Newport summer colonists enjoyed a variety of activities in the ballroom theatre. Among the outstanding events were several gala balls held each season, highly diversified musical and theatrical performances, lectures and the very popular semi-weekly dances, called hops.

In 1881, the theatre building became a setting for the annual subscription balls and other balls occasioned by special events held by members of the summer colony. These were instituted and continued on a regular basis until 1889. The annual subscription ball, the leading social event of the season, as anticipated, was given in the spacious enclosure of the theatre. These festive events typified the demonstration of the self-appointed regents of

Newport. The ball of 1883 drew between three hundred and four hundred guests. Admission to this was \$20.00 for each person. Part of the decorations included electric lights which created shadows of mystery and sensations. The *Newport Mercury* describes the occasion as having "the elegance of [sic] which cannot be described, never to be forgotten by those who were fortunate enough to witness it;⁴² During intermission, the use of the theatre verandahs, upstairs and downstairs, created an atmosphere of evening romance, with a drama of its own kind being fostered by the setting. At the gala given in 1885 only 100 tickets were available, still at \$20.00 apiece. The small number of tickets was indicative of the elitism that prevailed. By way of contrast, the ball of 1887 was more democratic. That year's ball "brought out more people than any other of the summer.,⁴³ In one of the Superintendent's diaries, a description of the 1888 ball states that the gallery between the theatre and the court tennis "served food at little tables and the lower piazza was used for strolling upon during intermissions." Both piazzas were enclosed with red and white canvas and lighted with Japanese lanterns.⁴⁴

The Casino's ninth brilliant annual subscription ball of a Wednesday evening in 1889 was a prominent feature covered in the social events of *The Season*.⁴⁵ The theatre's broad piazzas were enclosed and illuminated and over \$10,000 worth of tapestries loaned by Messrs. Sypher & Co., were used in the interior decorations. Between three hundred and four hundred guests were in attendance even though many prominent society people "doubtless because of weariness from the large number of entertainments given almost nightly throughout the month" were conspicuously absent.⁴⁶ Because of the concentration of this populace, if several did not make a personal appearance, there were always others of equal social prominence who were in attendance. Periodicals like *The Season* routinely

reported attendance by the summer colonists. "Mrs. Astor was brilliant in her emerald and diamond necklace. The stones were of monstrous size,,⁴⁷ The ornate dress of the guests rivaled the glamour of the setting.

The popularity of the annual ball attests to the devoted efforts of the summer colonists. The fabulously rich with an excessive level of wealth demonstrated their cultural power by the extravagance applied to each successive ball attempting to outdo the one the season before. By the 1890s, the Newport mansions were built with extensive ballrooms. This resulted in the Casino's annual ball being moved from the theatre to the various ballrooms in the mansions. Tessie OIrish's Rosecliff on Bellevue Avenue, which had one of the largest and most beautiful ballrooms in America, was the most spectacular setting for many a late summer ball.

The weeks of the summer, however, were brilliant ones during the Casino's earliest season of 1881. Good weather kept the establishment well attended. The first mention of a Casino Theatre performance in the local newspapers was that of an operatic concert given by the Saalfeld Grand Operatic Concert Co. of New York on 22 July. "The Company includes[d] Signor Brignoli, the great tenor, Mme. Carreno, the eminent pianiste, Signor Ferranti, the popular buffo, Miss Emily R. Spader, soprano and Miss Sara Barton, late of the Strakosch Company.'⁴⁸ Tickets at the box office, including reserved seats, were priced at \$1.50.

Amidst a flurry of engagements, the Casino sponsored a showcase of artistic talent. Three morning concerts were given in August 1881 by the concert pianist, Madame Constance Howard of New York City. The subscription at the Casino which included the best reserved seats" contained "many distinguished names," chiefly wealthy Newporters.

attend "a sacred concert" given by Lander's orchestra on 6 August 1881. This may have been on the Casino grounds outside; however, more than likely the theatre was used for this purpose. This activity appeared to be in "a direct violation of the Sunday law of the State, but, to the anger of some, it seems it is ranked among the sins to be winked at. If no admission were charged, there would have been no breaking of the State law, laying aside all moral considerations." The fact that the Casino "opened for gain" put it under the category of "forbidden entertainment." The Board of Aldermen who was the "legal authority for issuing licenses for entertainments" had not been consulted, but the public was reminded that chapter 612 of the public statutes declared that "no license shall be granted" for any "show or performance to be given on the first day of the week." Apparently the moral aspects of the law had been discussed at length and there was "a change in the views of some on the Sunday question, but Newport as a community "believe[d] in a seemly observance of the Sabbath" and judged that the Casino was in open violation of the law. Criticism, notwithstanding, the Sunday, 'sacred concerts' continued into the following season. Although, for the most part, the Newport Casino was being run by individuals of noteworthy reputation, many had powerful connections that may have influenced the decision. The fact that Rhode Island customarily was more lenient than other New England states regarding the observance of the Sabbath, did not exempt the state from outright abuses. However, Rhode Island was also founded on the freedom to choose and practice one's religion without interference from others.

The "sacred concert" practice continued into the following season. A bitter invective over these concerts appeared in the *Newport Mercury* during the 1882 summer season between a man writing under the pen name of "Civis" who defended the Casino and

another who viewed himself as the "voice of the Newport citizens." Some of the insults got ugly and the "voice" concedes that, properly managed, the Casino will no doubt prove a valuable acquisition to Newport, but "it will be anything but a desirable institution, if for the sake of a few dollars' gain, it is suffered to take on the name of a common bar-room and become a place where the Sabbath is to be systematically desecrated."⁵² The "voice" speaks of being informed "by a very high authority (possibly a clergyman or even a bishop) that 'the line between so-called sacred and secular music has become rather attenuated'." The "voice's" fear was that the argument might lead to the thinking that "if there is little distinction between sacred and secular music, there is still less between a "sacred concert" and a theatrical entertainment...,"⁵³

A divisive point seemed, however, to be over the fact that "Civis" who was born in Ireland was "attempting to instruct New Englanders in morals." 'The Voice' accused him of trying to transplant "into the very heart of New England the fashion of observing, or rather [Civis was] disregarding the Christian Sabbath which prevails in his native land, in common with almost all European countries." Earlier in the season, "Civis" had dismissed the dissenters as having been "born in New Hampshire or Maine and descended from Puritan stock; and that, accordingly, were imbued with "Puritanical notions."⁵⁴

The fact that entertainments at the Casino were "lightly attended" during the July 1882 season, and that the stores on the Avenue were doing "little trade thus far" and that "most were having trouble meeting expenses" may have contributed to the fact that the "sacred concerts" on Sunday were overlooked by the authorities for as long as they were. Somehow the whole affair seemed to fade away rather than be resolved openly, the result of which may be an early indicator of the political leverage that this institution was beginning

to acquire.

Despite any disharmony over the early uses of the theatre, the activities which occurred illustrate the diversity of offerings and artists which made up the life of the Casino theatre during these early summers. Works such as *After the Opera*, a popular American comedy, was "brought out very finely at the Casino Theatre Monday evening, before a large audience." In another performance, George Riddle, an elocutionist from Harvard, read scenes from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.⁵⁵ Also, the concerts at the Casino theatre on Saturday and Thursday mornings conducted by a Mr. Jules Jordan and Professor C.N.A. assisted by Professor Jas. H. Wilson, "played exceedingly fine and attracted appreciative audiences.,,"⁵⁶ The Casino Theatre was serving to whet the appetites of those who had acquired a preference for the best appealing to their aesthetic conscience.

On a daily basis, a diversity of entertainment was "*de regeur*" [sic]. On one evening in 1882, amateur actors of the Bellevue Dramatic Club, a group of wealthy citizens from Newport, performed *The Welsh Girl* and *Tom Cobb* while on another Dion Boucicault's comedy *London Assurance* was performed "being excellently rendered" at the Casino Theatre.⁵⁷

Recitals were given by eminent artists such as the court pianist to the Emperor of Germany and by various celebrated prima donnas and ballerinas. There were morning poetic readings and instructive lectures by such as Professor Alexander Agassiz, the marine biologist, who built his house at Castle Hill.. From time to time, colonists like Julia Ward Howe and Elisha Dyer, Jr. performed as minstrels and also in humorous plays. Shakespeare was represented by *As You Like It*, and Gilbert and Sullivan by *The Mikado*.⁵⁸

In addition to daily dancing classes, vaudeville and weekly magic shows were offered for

the children of the wealthy. Each season, during August and September, a Professor J. H. Foster was instrumental in organizing and conducting a fete, once again, underscoring the resources available to amuse the entire family.

Additionally, while on his now famous lecture tour throughout the United States between the years 1882-83, Oscar Wilde spent a three-week holiday at Newport. While there, he visited his Newport friends, suffragist and reformer, Julia Ward Howe, and Henry Ward Beecher, biographer.⁵⁹ Ward and Wilde had an enduring friendship where she invited him to dinners at her summer Newport home for which she was denounced by some of her neighbors. Even her friend of the 'Town & Country Club' T.W. Higginson accused her of "entertaining this pornographic poet in her home.,,⁶⁰ Wilde appeared at the Casino Theatre giving a lecture on the importance of the decorative arts which occasioned an unkind review by one unaware of his matchless persona. Cruel and tasteless, the review claims that the "the best part of the lecture by Oscar Wilde at the Casino Theatre on Saturday evening was the appearance of the stage, which was decorated \vith taste.,,⁶¹ In his biography, *Oscar Wilde*, Richard EHmann speaks of a rumor that Wilde "had brought with him [to Newport] the scenery for *Vera*,⁶² Wilde's first play produced in New York at the time which according to the New York Times was a failure.⁶³ Other professionals of lesser celebrity status though of optimal talent, appeared. A Professor Leon Florestan, of Paris, entertained at the Casino Theatre. Although the local papers did not carry a review of Mr Florestan's performance, his show at the Pittsfield Music Hall the week earlier indicated that

[Florestan] recited with power and eloquence, the programme, consisting of "Phedre," a French tragedy by Racine, in French, also "Othello" and the second and third acts of "The Lady of Lyons," in English. Mr. Florestan is a very fine scholar, and his

elocutionary power is very remarkable. In his own native tongue he is at his best, but he incorporates in his English recitation that fine sense of culture which enables him to draw not only the dollar from the pocket of his hearers but also pleasant smiles from their faces. Mr. Florestan received many compliments last evening from some of our best citizens.⁶⁴

Later, in 1888, on a Tuesday evening, artist-singer, Marie Biro de Marion gave an operatic concert appearing as Norma in *Norma*, Leonora in *Trovatore* and Agatha in *Freisa/utz* with Mr. Danckwardt and Miss M. Dilthey of the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City. The Newport Chorale assisted.⁶⁵ In 1892, at one morning performance of dramatic readings, a Miss Romola Tynte proved herself to be "an actress of no mean merit," with her interpretation of "Our First Quarrell," and "No Actress" in four scenes, "the dying scenes being especially good." Tynte also performed scenes from *Macbeth* with Miss Kathlynne Staunton Heron reciting the lighter parts of the program "completely fascinating her large audience." At this same performance, the Ariel Quartette rendered songs.⁶⁶ A play recorded as having been presented during the season of 1900 was entitled *The Councillor's Wife*, a three-act comedy drama by Jerome K. Jerome and Eden Phillpots, produced by The Eric Hope--May Robson Company.⁶⁷ The assortment of theatrical entertainments taking place at the theatre indicated that the Casino was not only cultivating a taste for erudition and refinement but also demonstrating the social strata which existed.

The social sYstem of Newport was most evident at the Casino "hops" or semi-weekly dances which were extremely popular. As was the custom, John Mullaly and his orchestra arrived the first week in July when the morning concerts and semi-weekly dances immediately began for the season.⁶⁸ As orchestra conductor, Professor Mullally, from

Harvard, was innovative in introducing new music into the theatre on a weekly basis. At first, the Casino Theatre sponsored a Saturday night dance as well, but when Ocean House Hotel on Bellevue Avenue, whose dances were always held on Saturday evening, asked that the Casino hold its dances during the week, the Casino establishment acceded to the Hotel's wishes.⁶⁹

The Casino Theatre "hops" were not simply dances. People flocked to them mostly "to see and to be seen." When it was announced that a well-known personality was to be present, a hop would draw a "magnificent turnout." For example, the theatre was filled when Oscar Wilde, who drew the eye along with opinions, made an appearance. In the early years of the theatre, counts, lords and their ladies, princes, Presidents Cleveland and Arthur, and various European royalty frequented the dances. An example of such representation was at the initial hop of the season the evening of 9 July 1886. A number of officers of the Twenty-third Regiment were present in full uniform at the Casino governors' invitation. The romantic sights along with the sounds of John Mullaly's orchestra, "the best that could be obtained," gave even a greater satisfaction to the crowd than the 1885 prior season.⁷⁰ Naturally, this type of display would draw an even more unusual crowd. At the same time, some of the older well known names in Newport are characteristically noted: Cushing (well known gallery), Griswald (An Association), Dresser (Newport Street), Havemeyer (society name) and Warren (co-originator of Preservation Society of Newport County) were among those who regularly made appearances at these dances. Dance-goers, like visiting Oscar Wilde, were greeted at the entrance on Hayden Court by impressive John Hazard, while Mullaly's orchestra on the stage in full dress played to the couples on the dance floor. At the numerous Casino dances, wealthy families often showed up with their debutante daughters

who might have recently 'come out' either in New York, Philadelphia or Newport.

The Casino dances, however, were not exclusively for the cottagers. Often the managers invited the ladies and gentlemen from the city **proper** to patronize them. It appeared as if the management wanted the public to enjoy and be exposed to the displays which graced the floor of the theatre. "The Casino hops-with the presence of spectators in the gallery looking down at the 'decorated toilettes on the parquet floor-lit⁷¹ signify that these hops were more than dances. They symbolized the order of society, albeit in a more relaxed way, where the wealth had rule over the **dance**, while the lower classes participated from the distant balconies. Through the spectacle created by these dances, spontaneous glimpses could be had of the cultural network of **Newport**. The social position of the classes held strong keeping the framework of "society" in place.

A variety of social and musical activities such as morning concerts at the Casino took place regularly under the patronage of the very wealthy. A Grande Morning Concert by Professor Richard Burmeister and Mme. Dory Bunneister Petersen, was under the patronage of Mrs. G.P. Wetmore of Chateau Sur Mer mansion, Mrs. John Jacob Astor of Beechwood and Le Baron d' Alvensle-ben, the German minister.⁷² The theatre tickets were priced at a mere \$2. and could be obtained at the Casino office. The evenings as well were devoted to the elite. At least one new opera entitled *Bounced* was given during the summer under the direction of M. Louis Lombard.

On one of the **evenings**, in 1886, when royalty was **present**, Prince Leopold of Canada and his comrades attended an event at the theatre. The yachting attractions often provided lively competition and kept some patrons away; yet, *The Season* records that "it was a first rate attendance for a Thursday night".⁷³ A good number of the patrons of the

Casino were yachting enthusiasts as well, many of whom, Belmont, Astor, Vanderbilt and Agassiz among them, owned their own pleasure crafts. The shareholders whose summers were replete with engagements often found that the Casino events were in conflict with their various other membership responsibilities.

For a time, it appeared as if the new elegant summer Music Hall for popular musical comedy which opened in June 1886 would present competition especially since it was located between the Casino and Ocean House Hotel on Bellvue Avenue.⁷⁴ However, the presence of the Hall actually seemed to strengthen the identity of the Newport Casino as the singularly elected place for entertainment of the well-to-do.

The theatre of the Casino was unique in that it was not just a theatre existing by itself but rather was part of a larger entity which influenced its theatrical life. Activities existing throughout the whole complex in a sense affected the ways in which the people experienced the theatre. The Newport Casino, particularly the theatre life, was in large measure the center out of which other kinds of expression would flow. The Casino theatre life was in some way responsible for the image which is attached to the City-by-the-Sea. When picturing the elite, absorbed with their lavish parties before and after the theatre, it appears as if some of the theatricality witnessed at the theatre spilled over into the summer community, playing itself out on a larger stage. The extreme to which the theatre penetrated the lives of this class brought it to the point where it became possible for a bona fide Broadway show to be shipped to a resort home in Newport, including actors, sets, and designers. This was considered an extension of the Casino Theatre, rather than competition. In August, 1902, for example, Mrs Cornelius Vanderbilt, Jr., thought nothing of closing for two days a New York hit of that era, the Irish play, *The Wild Rose*, and having the entire

company transported for a private performance to her Bellevue Avenue estate, Beaulieu.⁷⁵ Alan Schumacher claims that from the outset the theatre was an important factor in making the Casino society's favorite gathering place. He identifies it as the key drawing card which succeeded in offering the spectacular life which the summer colony endorsed.⁷⁶ The Casino theatre offered its guests a suspension from the formality of rigid expectancies which accompanied the 'haute couture' type of socializing. The handsome little theatre was faultless in creating the kind of escapism which theatre itself is known traditionally to provide.

Even though the excitement over the Casino started with a relatively small band of individuals, as the decades progressed, attraction to and attendance at the complex escalated. Before the Casino's existence, people did not usually "come in droves" to Newport until midsummer. However, as the 1880s progressed and well into the 1890s there was increased traffic on Bellevue Avenue. During the 1887 season in particular, the Casino prospered. Since the season was so successful, the majority of the "cottage colony remained in the city through October" extending the season.⁷⁷ The Newport of Bennett's day was a city going through a renaissance. The steamships, particularly the Fall River Line, made the city accessible to rich post-Civil War New Yorkers who were discovering the city as a summer refuge just as the Southern planters had done earlier.⁷⁸ And as Maude Howe Elliot reminds us, since then, "the tides of immigration from different regions swept with an increasing violence over the Island.,,79 The influx of society arriving each summer to Newport reads like a playbill and its cast of characters. The Newport scene by itself during this period was a dramatic event.

The image of a typical evening of theatre at the Casino would revolve around the

gorgeous sight of horses full drawn the length of Bellevue Avenue. On an evening of a season's opening, one could see the excitement which was exhibited with the swell of carriages extending the length of the Avenue between 4 and 6 o'clock.⁸⁰ The pageantry of the theatre was equaled by the beauty of the horses and coaches. As an example, "a spike team of three horses, two abreast and one in advance" driving up and down the short stretch of road, once led respected Newport author, Maude Howe Elliott, to exclaim "no finer could match any sight in Hyde Park or the Champs Elysees."⁸¹ It appears that since the Casino's existence, the summer colony each year would return to their cottages earlier than usual which pushed forward the so called "opening of the season." Among the several early Casino club subscribers who registered at the Casino for the season in June 1886, were Mrs G. T. Trumbull, of Newport" Mr. Townsend Smith, of Cambridge, and Mr. Wetmore Cryder, of New York.⁸² And although Mr. Bennett was absent from Newport much more than he was present, since he spent much of his time in Europe, when he returned to "Stone Villa," in that same June, his visits to his Casino presented opportunities for great recreations providing the occasion for his customary generosity of circulating a great deal of money in Newport.

Not just the interior and exterior of the Casino but its very location within the city reflects the attitudes and concerns of the group that created and sustained it. The group included an elite of the wealthy and prominent emanating from Fifth Avenue, the French Riviera, West Palm Beach" and Newport, Rhode Island. These people could choose from what the international world had to offer. The Casino became a focal point of social life for the "Four Hundred," as Newport historian, Ward McAllister, so aptly named America's 50-called plutocracy.⁸³ Considered the high rollers of their day, when they arrived, they

brought their lives with them. They settled with all their belongings for the **summer**,⁸⁴ unlike **today**, where Newport is simply one among many places visited by the rich. For the most part, today's wealthy do not remain in one place for any length of time since the automobile and air travel changed **that**. Rather they visit numerous spots for short periods.⁸⁵

During the end of the nineteenth century, however, life was different with respect to lack of mobility. At this time, a select group, with a cultural importance all its own, took over the Casino Theatre year after year, the two entities, colony and the theatre, gave life to one another.

Perhaps the two events of present day Newport that compares to the Casino life of yesterday is the Newport Music Festival and the Coaching Weekend. The **wealthy**, as well as thousands of classical music lovers of various economic **strata**, today can be seen in Newport every summer attending the event which is conducted at the mansions. General director, Mark Malcovitch, III draws from scores of world-class performers. This event which has occurred every July for more than twenty-five years, and runs for a full two weeks, resembles the culture which was seen in the city during the reigning years of the Casino.

Every three years, the Newport Music Festival coincides with the coaching weekend with coaches and accessories of liveried coachmen, seen transporting the costumed guests in a spectacular parade the length of Bellevue Avenue. The procession ends at one of the Newport mansions to complete the evening with a dinner and a ball. These two events attract both lovers of classical music and coaching enthusiasts. They are a type of ritual which reenacts a significant social event connecting the city to a similar scene which took place during the late nineteenth century. The attempt to recapture the look of nineteenth-

century Newport, when the splendor of the theatrical fostered by the Casino Theatre was in full swing, is still appreciated.

Newport's summer colonists loved the theatre from their earliest days. One of the more popular expressions of entertainment for them and a connection to the dramatic was the paratheatrical, a type of diversion which was performed in private homes. These occurred before the Casino Theatre existed, but continued until the 1900s. Although not the focus of the present work, the paratheatrical, a sub-genre of theatre involving amateurs who performed in a relaxed or informal setting for their own pleasure and that of friends, existed in Newport. The first of these appeared with the proliferation of cottages in the 1850s and escalated during the 1890s and the turn-of-the-century. A number of Casino patrons were engaged in this popular pastime. An impresario of the paratheatrical, Stanford White, thrived on hosting expensive parties, more frequently in New York, where the guests would arrive in costume and the entire cast of players would create its own theatre. The object of much of this was still power. From the 1850s on, the resort house or the summer home had become a significant part of American history, which offered the natural setting for extravagant dinners and various types of posh cottage entertainments. The paratheatrical became a popular vehicle for filling in the leisure hours, the practice of which soon came to resemble costume parties. At these fancy dress affairs Newport costumes were the height of invention.

During the 1860s entire expeditions of families were engaged in staging the paratheatrical, not only in Newport but in other regions as well, in particular, New York. The prominent Bedlow family of Newport had its own theatre called "The New-Day Theatre" with its troupe of "actors" drawn from the cultural elite of the city. The Bedlow

household hosted these theatrical affairs with its cast of Newport friends. Famous among them was Ellen Connell, a well known Newport diarist.⁸⁶ Even in the 1870s, a type of successful vehicle of the paratheatrical, although on a more intellectual level, was the Town and Country Club which for years had a room set apart for dramatic performances in "Bay Side," now demolished, the home of club members, Mr. and Mrs John W. Bigelow, on Washington Street in the Point section.⁸⁷ The club, limited to fifty, composed of polished, well-educated individuals from the literary and cultural circles boasted such eminent members as Henry and William James, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Richard Morris Hunt, John LaFarge, Alexander Agassiz and, for a time, Edith Wharton.⁸⁸ The Town & Country Club's paratheatricals, however, resembled more the Harvard commencement exercises with their Greek and Latin orations beginning each performance. By contrast, years later, the Casino club members with their outbursts of merriment and defiance of protocol engaged in their own version of the paratheatrical.

The person behind the creation of the Casino at Newport was perhaps as interesting as **anything** he could **invent**. Before the civic-minded Bennett provided Newport with a Casino, there was no place, other than private homes or smaller clubs, where the cottagers could congregate and enjoy the type of social interaction that it offered. Newport was ready for such a facility as the Newport **Casino**. The "Queen of Resorts" at this time was no longer the only watering place or spa for society.⁸⁹ Therefore, Bennett's plan to establish a new club in 1880 was timely. The most socially and culturally prominent of all the social centers in the city, it surpassed such places as the Newport Reading Room, the Clambake Club, the Gooseberry Island Fishing Club, the Ocean House, and the Spouting Rock Beach

Association, otherwise known as Bailey's Beach Club as an entertainment capital and sports hub.

From the beginning, the Casino's Theatre housed noteworthy events and performers, all capable of transporting one to another time and place. Whether it be the seasonal balls or Oscar Wilde lecturing and reading poetry; Alexandra Danilova in an evening of ballet; Fray and Braggiotti, the first duo-pianists to appear at the theatre; or such talent as the Metropolitan Opera Studio in chamber operas, the early years of the theatre reflect a stream of successes. The virtuosity appearing on the Casino stage illustrate the good taste and discernment of the associates of James G. Bennett. His was the entrepreneurial panache that initiated an alternative scene of action, an exclusive affiliation which many hoped would become a permanent Newport fixture.

In his book entitled *The Last Resorts* written in 1958, Cleveland Amory divides Newport into three parts: the naval, the historic and the social.⁹⁰ Some may feel that Amory's descriptions shortchange the city. Nonetheless, one of Amory's divisions, the social, has always been a significant factor which has helped to shape the image of Newport, and the Casino is central to that image. The Casino Theatre is one structure through which Newport's wealthy made its strong and indelible mark. The rank and power visible in the Casino halls took root in the establishment and held its cultural sway.

The erection of the Casino Club, in 1880, was considered a turning point in Newport's social history. It introduced the city's most lavish era and, although the Gilded Age in Newport lasted only forty years (1880-1920), that time period, in a sense, is easily recalled by the continued presence of the wooden shingled showpiece which helped to foster the city's being called the nation's social capital. Ranked as one of the most

distinguished buildings of the early 1880s, the Casino design exhibits its authentic purpose which was high-classed entertainment. The complex itself is "controlled by a coherent spatial sense and a general sense of order, and opening out where possible into the most inventive kind of spatial, structural, and textural experiment."⁹¹ While not huge, the complex is a cozy well-integrated use of space where more than one hundred years ago its elegant little theatre succeeded in creating an extravaganza of dynamic proportions. The early life of the Casino Theatre was enhanced by its wealthy patrons who contributed to making the Newport Casino a repository of talent. All the people involved, from Bannen down to the last of the summer colonists were responsible for the legacy that still draws interest today. The owner, the designers, the patrons and even the Casino Theatre itself stands as a metaphor expressing the unique wealth which transfixed Newport during this period and contributed a rich cultural history to the city.

By the time that more formal plans were being made, in 1927, to recondition the building and convert it into a "regular theatre," some of the principal players responsible for the theatre's early achievements were no longer present in Newport. Stanford White was murdered in 1906,⁹² and James Bennett died in Paris in 1923 at the age of eighty-one. The facility itself and the summer colony remained. Thus, two of the four generating forces continued to sustain the theatre through the years from 1927 to 1934 that would prove to be its second and greater period of glory. A new chapter was about to begin in which the two forces, Theatre and colony, would unite to bring about the prosperous days of the Casino Theatre.

CHAPTER TWO

BRIEF CANDLE: THE DIVINE MOMENTS 1927-1934

The unlimited resources of wealth circulating in Newport during the late nineteenth century resulted in the city becoming a cultural mecca. A sybaritic lifestyle dominating the period brought a singular opulence to the city as the socially and culturally prominent for whom real estate property was paramount maintained summer residences in Newport. In a period prior to the anti-trusts laws and personal income tax, the accumulation of great wealth allowed those of a high income bracket to be in a position to procure for themselves anything that brought pleasure. By the turn of the twentieth century, Newport was becoming a conduit through which inherited wealth passed effortlessly. In this respect, the summer colony directly contributed to maintaining Newport as the social capital.

Despite the bright prospects, it should be remembered that all was not perfect for those of a privileged birthright. Two events soon disrupted society harmony in resorts throughout America: the sinking of the *Titanic* shortly before midnight on 14 April 1912 and the torpedoing of the *Lusitania* that followed on 7 May 1915. With the destruction of these oceanliners, a number of wealthy Americans perished. In Newport alone, several families, the Astors and the Vanderbilts among them, were affected. Overall, not only were lives lost, but incomes and investments were shaken and, in some instances, altered overnight. Some individuals experienced major setbacks, the results of which hampered resorts like Newport that depended on reserves afforded by wealth for its subsistence.

Although these misfortunes were early contributing factors to the slowing of Newport as a summer resort, they failed to extinguish the fervor for an extravagant lifestyle characteristic of the well-to-do. Following the disasters, it appears as if many were impelled to lead lives that mocked the transitory nature of existence and to adopt a disposition that fostered a type of self-assured independence. A proclivity for gracious living led some to lean heavily on their incomes to satisfy their needs and to project a self-contained state of being. Perhaps this line of thinking served as a form of insulation from the harsh realities suffered. Inner pressure to demonstrate to themselves that they were alive and living the good life appeared to be greater than ever. The urgency to create an image of success and well-being even though there were diminishing reasons for cheerfulness characterized the behavior of the wealthy. The anticipated ends appeared to justify the means.

The beauty of the Casino Theatre, in particular, which articulated a suburban American aesthetic, attracted these people of means to the degree that, although it was closed during most of the period between 1904 and 1927 (even though films were shown intermittently as late as 1926), it was not long before some of the wealthy Casino stockholders were inspired to put money into remodeling the building. Moses Taylor, well known in summer and other interests of Newport and a leader in the financial and social circles in New York, emerged as one of the new principal players, in 1927, to redefine the Casino Theatre. Along with William H. Vanderbilt and Arthur Curtiss James, Taylor was responsible for converting the cotillion ballroom into a modern theatre, the cost of which approximated \$50,000. Almost singlehandedly, he financed the costs of the operation which included a new stage, sixteen remodeled boxes and up-to-date stage lighting. Analogous to the wealthy Athenians of fifth-century Greece, B.C.E., whose civic duty was

to financially back the festival contests, the three could be regarded as willing modern-day choreographers of Newport.

In reopening the theatre, the aim was to preserve as much as possible the social charm and grace of the early years. Care was taken in the restoration to lose none of the nineteenth-century appeal. Ranked as one of Stanford White's most distinguished creations, the cream-colored basketwork of the walls and the gold leaf was as bright in 1927 as were the jaded arches. The crystal chandeliers remained unchanged, rich in the tradition of the past. As the ballroom was converted into a regular theatre, the five hundred collapsible seats became permanent.¹ A scenic designer from New York, Livingston Platt, was hired to oversee the erection of an entirely new stage and arrange for the lighting plan. Cost for this was approximately \$20,000.² After studying art abroad, Platt returned to America in 1911 and was hired as set and costume designer first for Mrs. Lyman Gale's Boston Toy Theatre and later for Margaret Anglin's four 1914 Shakespearean revivals at the Hudson Theatre in New York.³ At Newport, he was also responsible for placing several leading professional stars under contract. The outcome of all efforts combined resulted in the Casino Theatre's presence transforming the setting of the Avenue and stepping up the pace of activity.

Upon its completion, Taylor inaugurated what became known as the Newport Theatre Festival. The specialized undertaking originated in the summer of 1927 when the Casino stockholders leased the theatre to him and his group calling themselves "The Casino Players." With purpose and resolve, Taylor prepared a program for the festival. Newport already had a long history of theatrical broadmindedness of which Taylor and his associates were mindful. As early as the eighteenth century, the city had been active in the support of the artist. The first theatre in New England of which there is any authentic record was in

Newport, a point made clear by Blake and Willard in their histories on the Providence stage.⁴ During the final decade of the eighteenth century, the Brick Market had housed a respectable playhouse under Alexander Placide of Boston, and theatre continued there intermittently into the nineteenth century. Newport had been a sanctuary for many actors during a period of overall hostility for the profession, shielding them from the Puritan determination that hounded them out of other cities. It is not surprising, therefore, that Taylor thought Newport the logical place for a national dramatic festival and in his words "deserv[er]d] to be made the Canterbury to which all fine actors come on pilgrimage...⁵ Under Taylor's governance, a dramatic program was arranged for the Company's opening in 1927, initiating a new focus of interest in the life of the Casino Theatre.

Moses Taylor managed the Newport Theatre Company, Inc., which was comprised mostly of professional New York stage actors, contracted for a series of six plays in 1927 and eight in 1928. In 1927, a six-week season (even though an eight-week was initially announced) was launched. Each production ran five nights beginning Tuesday, with a Saturday matinee. According to a report published by the Officers of the Newport Casino Theatre Company, the box seats were priced at a costly \$6.50 while the orchestra seats began at \$3.30. Despite the expense to patrons, under the 'Geist' of its first managers, the theatre was to flower while under their leadership.

Primarily and fundamentally social professionals, the Newport summer colonists were actively involved in the opening of the dramatic season. Given first bids at early subscriptions, a large number lost no time in **obtaining** season boxes. The colonists faithfully took pre-theatre dinner guests to the plays at the Casino. And the brisk demands for boxes by those desirous of entertaining visitors were encouraging. By their attention and

association, those of a high social position and self-entitlement bore a direct impact on the theatre's early life under Taylor's leadership.

Worldly-educated and socially sensitive, the colonists were eager to match the Broadway offerings which many had already seen during their winters in New York. The Newport summer colony spared no cost in bringing the best of theatre to the Newport playhouse. Overall, the band of professionals engaged from New York had already achieved artistic success in demanding critical circles. The Casino Theatre Company's premiere was *Hamlet, in Modern Dress* with Basil Sydney as Hamlet and former light opera star, Mary Ellis, as Ophelia who "with one of the most natural voices on the stage" was able to convey in a modern manner the psychology of Ophelia "without losing one whit of the poetry."⁶ When the play was well received in London and New York, it became obvious that Shakespeare need not be in period costume to be a success. Sydney who had performed the role formerly in New York and subsequently throughout the country became "a favorite with the summer colony overnight."

In the New York performance Sydney was compared to Burbage by the New York critics. The actor had already received acclaim "by discriminating minds" since his "Mercurio," and the fact that his *Hamlet* was ardently received in New York was good publicity for the little theatre by the sea. By this time, John Barrymore had gone to Hollywood and it was broadly hinted that Sydney would be "the logical successor to the great ones of the past.,⁷ In the Newport *Hamlet*, Helen Ware played Gertrude, and Kenneth Hunter as Claudius brought "an original and provoking fascination to the character of the King."⁸ The *Hamlet* production at Newport was handled by eight professional stagehands from New York. Sets and lights arranged by Livingston Plan, the technical director, "were

perfection in themselves." Several of the younger generation from Newport's summer colony- among them Florence Havemeyer, Emily Winslow and Theodora Winslow- had minor parts "which they did particularly well."

Hamlet, with its rapid succession of triumphs, all combined to make the production "the best drama seen here [Newport] in recent years, if not, indeed, the finest presentation of *Hamlet*, in modem clothes, seen anywhere.,⁹ Kenneth Hunter who played the King was "a master." Two other actors also from the original New York productions were Walter Kingsford in the dual role of Polonius and the first Grave Digger and Herbert Ranson as the Ghost and Player King. Both were considered "the acme of perfection" in these parts. Edgar Kent played Horatio while Harold Webster as Bernardo and Osric "lived up to his long association with Sothem and Jane Cowl." Marion Morehouse "made a graceful Player Queen," and John McGovern of the Theatre Guild "was adept as the poisoner." The role for which Sydney was becoming known in America prompted one columnist to write:

It is strange, but obviously true, that *Hamlet*, in modem dress, makes one feel as much at home with the play as Shakespeare's audiences must have felt. As Shakespeare was the Avery Hopwood and Eugene O'Neill of his day, in one, the production in such a vitally new way was little short of melodrama. Burbage, Shakespeare's leading man, must have affected his audiences in much the same manner that Sydney now affects his.¹⁰

The first choice of the Casino Company, a modernized version of a classical tragedy, drew the crowds and made good the potential for excellent theatre to which the Casino aspired.

The extraordinarily influential individuals who comprised the Newport summer colony were able and willing to promote the theatre's advance in the city. Through their distinguished names and social **daring**, they actuated the Casino's prominence to the degree

that opening night at the new theatre signaled a rare excitement over Taylor's idea when the wealthy left few vacant seats. "Probably never before in the city's history [had] there been such a representative gathering." Each of the sixteen boxes in the re-modeled theatre were filled with guests while others "along with scores of wealthy Newporters" were noted in the audience. The new seats at the Casino Theatre, still numbering around five hundred, were "not exceeded for comfortableness.,¹¹ The successful plays, combined with the stars and the prices, soon made the productions a salient success. The notion circulated for a time that the Casino productions were for the summer colony only. But the Theatre management quickly squelched the rumors and raised expectations that nothing could be farther from the truth.¹² In reaction to the talk, the Casino Theatre Company scaled some of the prices to be within the reach of many, as the management also relied on the Newport public.

During the second week of the 1927 season, the Theatre Company turned from tragedy to a light French farce. *Banco*, a play from the French written by Alfred Savoir and Americanized by translator Clare Kummer, starred Basil Sydney and Mary Ellis in the roles which Alfred Lunt and Lois Fisher played in the New York production. Ellis was even better suited to the role of Charlotte than Ophelia, since she was accustomed to this type of light comedy having had the lead in the New York operetta, *Rose Marie*. Helen Ware, who had had a long and varied theatrical experience played the role of Baroness Delignieres.¹³ The sets for the three scenes were the originals used in the Broadway production as designed by Livingston Platt, who directed the Newport performance. For some reason *Banco* did better toward the end of the week than on opening night. What probably interested Newporters was the fact that the popular Francis (Mecca) Byrne of the city had a prominent role in the play.

Since Tuesday evening was generally accepted as society night at the Casino Theatre Festival, the house was filled with summer colonists. Moses Taylor, president of the Company, took his box guests to a room at the rear of stage for a reception with the players who were being well entertained by the colonists during their stay. Taylor and Vanderbilt acted as hosts to the summer colonists as they arrived to occupy their boxes or to be seated in the orchestra. Listed among the boxholders, many of whom held pre-theatre dinners before escorting their guests to the theatre, were the Astors of Beechwood, the Vanderbilts of The Breakers, and the Oelrichs of Rosecliff.

A gradual growth of subscriptions and widespread interest in the Theatre Festival resulted in groups beginning to feel a part of the action. Wednesday was chosen as Lions' night, Thursday as Rotarian night and Saturday as Elks' night as Newporters fell into line attempting to make the new theatrical venture their own. The festival became an important event to the Navy as well who strongly represented the majority of the season subscriptions. Jamestown participated, and wealthy parties came to Newport from Narragansett Pier especially for a Casino performance and registered for the evening at the Hotel Viking on fashionable Bellevue Avenue. Interest in the plays went beyond the Island and vicinity. Through various publicity channels, women's clubs in Fall River and outlying towns like Westport and Seaconnet (now spelled Sakonnet) were contacted and "a central office was established at the Women's Exchange, Rock Street in Fall River:" where tickets could be reserved. The Theatre management received telegrams from various parts of the country including Pennsylvania, New Hampshire and New Jersey making reservations for August.¹⁴

Newport became the center for drama during the summer months when the theatre was comparatively quiet in New York and the most prominent stars became available. The

mild climate of the city attracted veteran and novice actors to its shores. The Casino plays were conspicuous in their triumph as a capacity audience crowded the theatre to the doors for the opening of Shaw's *The Devil's Disciple*. The theatre festival was growing in popularity. For the first time "a complete sale of seats made it impossible to obtain one at the box office in advance" of Tuesday evening's opening performance. Out-of-town newspapers recognizing the significance of the movement sent their theatre critics to review the performances. Tuesday's *Devil's Disciple* found every box filled with summer colonists and their guests, and the majority of seats in the audience were also taken by summer residents while "others filled the theatre to the point of standing.,¹⁵

An accomplished young actress, Patricia Barclay, leading woman at the time to Elliot Dexter in New York, came to Newport for smaller roles with Sydney and Ellis who took the leads. Given her first leading role by Boston-born producer John D. Williams in association with Carl Reed in *Lally*, not even the Theatre Guild or the Shuberts had thought of casting Barclay for straight comedy.¹⁶ Helen Ware, whom New York critics held in high regard, played. Among others who had leading roles was Phillip Loew, a noted stage manager. Soon-to-be-founder of the Group Theatre, Harold Clunnam, played a minor role. This recognition that the Casino theatre received was the type of commendation that Bennett would have anticipated and a sign of its rising stature in Newport. In a relatively short period of time, the popularity of the festival engendered both a sense of worth as a burgeoning entity and a growing confidence in the Casino's ability to please a large audience.

The seating capacity of the Theatre was oversold for *The Romantic Young Lady*, the fourth play on the Newport bill. Well known and prolific Spanish playwright, G. Maninez

Sierra's three-act comedy adapted by Helen and Harley Granville-Barker was staged by Harold Clurman.¹⁷ Opening night at the Casino was such an attraction that a special row of chairs had to be placed near the entrance while many were forced to stand. The festival was attracting widespread interest. Ward Morehouse representing the *New York Sun* made the trip from that city for the express purpose of reviewing the light comedy. Morehouse and others agreed with one local writer who wrote that "It appeared as if everyone in the summer colony was present at the Casino Theatre for the opening performance",¹⁸ *The Romantic Young Lady* marked the last appearance of Sydney and future-wife, Ellis, at the festival.

A comparison of attendance at the plays showed a steady increase each week where it became virtually impossible to secure a seat for the opening performances on Tuesday evenings. The following nights were also well attended as Newport was being recognized as a theatrical *boite de nuit*. The Casino became a formal affair both in attire and behavior. Mr. and Mrs. William F. Whitehouse, the new owners of "Stone Villa" on the Avenue, (formerly the James Gordon Bennett estate) were among those giving pre-theatre dinners. Attention was lavished on the players appearing at the Casino Theatre. Accompanying the rituals of matinees and opening nights, luncheons and receptions were **given** in their honor to make them feel at home. Maude Howe Elliot, a staunch supporter of the arts in the city, frequently made the Newport Art Association available to the Casino acting company.¹⁹ In a number of articles that appeared in various Rhode Island newspapers and journals, Elliot, through her enthusiasm and writings, exhorted Newporters to support the various activities throughout the city, especially music and theatre at the Casino. The author encouraged the public to keep company with foremost American actors," since, in her opinion, "neither in

London and New York can be found anything finer in dramatic work than what is being offered... by the Newport Casino Company.¹¹²⁰

Henry Hull and Julia Hoyt, the second pair appearing on the Newport bill, were widely known for their work on the professional stage.²¹ Hoyt was the daughter of Mrs. Julian W. Robbins of the summer colony. The actors' initial Newport appearance was in Hungarian author Ferenc Molnar's comedy, *The Guardsman*. Sophisticated in tone as well as ironically revealing about the sexes, which is characteristic of the author, admittedly, the play must have been a difficult one to communicate to an audience. Its last presentation had been in 1924 by the Theatre Guild of New York. At the Newport opening before another capacity audience, "composed mostly of society people" at the Casino theatre "a finished performance was done with consummate skill." Madame Fely Clement, formerly of the *Boston Grand Opera Company*, was in Newport as guest of General and Mrs. j Fred Pierson. She sang various numbers from *Madame Butterfly* while the principals (Hoyt and Hull) were attending an Opera during the second act. Among those in the audience were Basil Sydney and Mary Ellis who had the leading roles the past four weeks. Also present was Pauline Lord who had arrived from New York to begin rehearsals for *Candida*. Tradition held that performers should arrive for an engagement a day early to witness the play that was closing.

Candida, Shaw's counterblast to Ibsen's *A Doll House* and the last in a series of six plays, had stirred interest at Newport. The play featured Pauline Lord in the lead a role in which all the leading New York critics declared that she would be best.²¹ Lord was hesitant to take the part in New York because she did not want to be tied to a long engagement. Her first attempt at *Candida* was in Newport, and she came from New York especially for this

production. The appearance of Lord and Henry Hull, the principals in **Newport**, was an event in theatrical circles that attracted the attention of New York.²³ The role of "Marchbanks" which Bernard Shaw originally wrote for Granville **Barker**, was played by Henry Hull in **Newport**. "Herbert Ranson" given his first opportunity in a featured role as "Reverend Anderson Morrell" was recorded by Shaw himself, not given to praise, as the finest Morrell he had ever seen. Ranson was long known as the "sheriff" because of his part in David Belasco's *The Girl of the Golden West*. Helen Ware played Prossy which she had recently acted with great success in the Arnold Daly and Winchell Smith production. As one of Shaw's strongest advocates in **America**, Daly maintained close ties to Shaw's family.²⁴

While many, including Moses Taylor, president of the Company, led the success of what was termed a doubtful venture at the outset by some, Lillian **Barrett**, secretary of the Casino Theatre **Company**, was a moving factor in the success of the Casino's first dramatic season and probably did more than any other individual in selecting the productions, conducting the numerous details and otherwise contributing to its success. Even before the theatrical **season** became a reality, Barrett's role was important. Before closing her office in the Casino building for the first season" she recorded that there were three times as many seat reservations for the 1928 season than there were when the 1927 season ended.²⁵

The festival, a decided success, filled a long felt want. A talisman in the hands of the wealthy summer colonists, the theatre was becoming a novelty at **Newport**. By the end of its first successful season, under colony urging and **support**, the **Newport Casino Theatre** was merging with the onswEEPing imperial mood of the Gilded Age. Bennett's creative spirit in action was becoming a highly intensive work in progress. Under the aegis of devoted

advocates, Bennett's *idée fixe* was perspicuous behind the theatre's fine start in 1927.

Despite the unexpected death, on 15 May, of Moses Taylor prior to the 1928 season, plans went as scheduled at the encouragement of Mrs Taylor, the former Edith Bishop. Others of the summer colony also came forward to rescue the theatre project. With the death of Taylor, William H. Vanderbilt as vice-president of the Company assumed the position of acting head. He was supported by others convinced of the theatre's value not only in their own lives but for what it could bring to the city in terms of a cultural alternative. Mrs. Moses Taylor, James Stewart Cushman, Edith and Maude Wetmore, Oliver Gould Jennings and Mrs. Arthur Curtiss James are only a few who stand out in their interest and dedication. There was no question relative to the artistic merits of the endeavor. Many felt indebted to the efforts of Taylor who gave unstintingly of his financial backing, providing the funds to remodel the theatre and prepare it for the plays. Taylor had been the ultimate force in reviving the theatre. Though downhearted by the loss of their spokesman, the colonists were not about to let the playhouse slip through their fingers. The festival had been a success beyond the expectations of the organizers. Consequently, the theatre office in the Casino Theatre building opened on 18 June 1928 to receive reservations.²⁶ Early subscriptions for the coming plays were "well in excess" of those the previous year, and it appeared that the project would be able to carry along financially.²⁷ This was good news to the summer colony and others in Newport who had evidenced a strong interest and were instrumental in the decision to extend the 1928 theatrical season from six to eight weeks.

The colony was gaining a strong foothold at the Theatre, one in accord with its style of high spending. As benefactors, they were in a position to have their voices heard with regards to what took place at the Theatre. One of their own, Lillian Barrett, by this time the

key figure in the signing of the players and selection of the plays during the eight-week season, contributed significantly to the life of the festival. She spent several weeks in New York attending to the many details in connection with the project (particularly placing stars under contract) and returned in mid June to open the local office for subscriptions which began on 26 June. In addition, mail orders were taken during the entire month of June. The prices for all productions were the same as the year before, with the exception of a war tax ldue to the action of Congress in removing this."²⁵ The range of prices was such as to be within the reach of those other than the wealthy colonists although the boxes and orchestra were still expensive at \$2.60 and \$2.40 ,respectively. This was still less than the season earlier which was \$3.30. On Saturday evenings a special rate of \$1. was granted to the children of Newport. Philosophically committed to his undertaking, William Vanderbilt gave his steady attention to the theatre and was willing to do everything in his power to make the enterprise a success.

Many of those connected with the executive staff in 1927 were retained for the 1928 season. Livingston Platt continued as technical director, with Doris Riker as assistant technical director, in charge of scenery. Barrett in charge of the executive end kept Katherine Long as her assistant. Samuel Levy remained in charge of the box office, and Joseph G. Nevins continued as house manager. Frederick Burt directed all the plays of 1928. A brilliant array of stars was signed for the 1928 season including Sir Rollo Peters, Maria Ouspenskaya, Rose Hobart, France Bendtsen, Basil Rathbone, Violet Kemble Cooper and Walter Kingsford. There would be a total of eight plays, each to be given for a week, with the actors having one week to rehearse.

The Casino Theatre Company, Inc., opened its 1928 season with Gerald du

Maurier's *Peter Jbbetson*. Produced with great success many times in New York, it was to see a revival the following winter with several of the same actors who performed in the Newport production. Rehearsals for the play were held at the Playhouse in New York under the direction of J. Lester Lonergan.²⁹ The Company arrived in Newport on Monday, 9 July, one day before the opening performance. The level of difficulty of the play's dream scenes is a supreme test of the skill of the technical director, the type of challenge which proved the inventiveness of Livingston Platt. The nineteenth-century costumes added to the "fragrance and charm" of the productions. Rollo Peters appeared in the title role with Selina Royle as Mary, Duchess of Towers. The play also included "the popular favorite" Charles Croker-King. All the leads were from the Theatre Guild. Staged with the high standards which established the Casino Theatre festival as a success the season before, a "capacity gathering united in its acclaim."

The performance demonstrated the thoroughness with which Vanderbilt and his assistants and directors had gone about the staging. Favorable in his review, one writer observes, "it could not have been better presented in a New York theatre." It was noted that the opening was attended by a gathering of society people "comparable to the opening night of the Metropolitan Opera."JO All the boxes were taken for Wednesday evening as well as for the opening. Among some of the new box owners were Mrs. T. Shaw Safe, of Boston, Mr. and Mrs. Maxim Karolik and Dr. and Mrs. Alexander Hamilton Rice. Many others of the colony had seat reservations.³¹ The best proof of the play's success was the reception by the audience, "which remained to applaud vigorously at the late hour when it terminated." From its earliest days, through their generous sponsorship, the summer colonists demonstrated their willingness to support the theatre wholeheartedly.

Ina Claire played the thieving heroine in Frederick Londale's *The Last of Mrs. Cheyney*, the second effort of the season by the Casino Players.³² Claire reproduced the role in which she had a long run in New York and elsewhere. A figure of distinction in the world of the theatre, her latest achievement had been in a Broadway revival of Somerset Maugharn's play, *Our Betters*, which not only surpassed the original run by many months, but also became the most successful revival New York had ever had. Only days before the Newport production, the New York newspapers announced Claire's signing for two years as the lead in *Nell Gwynn* at a salary of "\$5,000 a week, an exceptional figure at that time."³³ Considered one of the finest comedienues of her generation, Claire became one of its most sought-after actors.

Inevitably, Ina Claire attracted the largest audience the Casino productions had ever had. The ovations which she received at the end of each act testified to the manner in which the Newport audience appreciated her art. Those who saw her perform in *Mrs Cheyney* understood the reason for her eminence in the dramatic world. A discerning audience, rraccustomed to witnessing the best the American stage has[d] to offer, could readily see that Miss Claire was given proper support from a galaxy of stars, and that the production was staged with the completeness which characterizes Broadway productions.,³⁴ In writing of the last performance of her career, critic, John Mason Brown, referred to Claire as the "Comic Spirit incarnate."

Featured with Ina Claire at Newport was a well known English actor, A.E.Mathews, who had many leading roles in principal stage successes. Mathews played in London for twenty years, and also in Paris. According to the actor, the historic performance ofms career was appearing in *The School for Scandal* at the coronation of King Edward VN at His

Majesty's Theatre, London. As the actor recollects, the company consisted of all the stars of London, Paris and New York, and Dame Clara Butt sang at the performance.^{fl3S} Mathews starred in "about a dozen plays" during this time in the United States, notably *Peg O' My Heart* and *Nothing But The Truth* each of which ran for two years, and in *Daddies* with Ina Claire which achieved a year's run.

Among others prominent in the supporting cast were Ilka Chase (pulitzer author and journalist), Rose Hobart and Philip Tonge. Tonge was a well known character actor who, as a child, played with Herbert Beerbohn Tree, then with Henry Irving and Ellen Terry before coming to America under Charles Frohman's management where he had appeared alongside such great actors as Dame Edith Evans, Lunt and Fontanne, Noel Coward and Katherine Hepburn.³⁶ A special word of praise went to Newport amateur Mary Howard, both in *Peter Ebbsen* and *The Last of Mrs. Cheyney* for her "skill on a par with many of the professional stars of such magnitude." Alan Fagan, brother of Ina Claire, staged the production.

The festival audience was becoming a prime moving force at the theatre. Cowboy humorist Will Rogers, who was devoting considerable time writing articles for the *Saturday Evening Post*, appeared at the Theatre Monday evening 23 July to deliver one of the inimitable monologues that made him famous on two continents. For the better part of two-and-one-half hours, Rogers held the stage maligning the more affluent of the summer colony. In particular, Vanderbilt and Astor were satirized for their prominence in the social trends of the time. The consideration given the more celebrated members of the audience ratified their status within the Newport community. It was as if the evening's entertainment was especially for them, and they enjoyed the attention. Rogers's night of insults aimed directly at the 'high and mighty' kept alive and reinforced the notion that the theatre was first

and foremost theirs.

Capable of winning local raves, the plays stimulated colony eagerness to attend and a desire to subsidize the company's efforts. Based on a strong involvement by those who could make a significant difference, the Casino stage was transformed into a panoply of talent. The Theatre on the Avenue's third play of the 1928 season saw Grace George playing alongside Charles Trowbridge in Paul Gerald's and Robert Spitzer's *She had to Know*. George, who had translated the farce from the French, created the lead in the original New York production. Another Ferenc Molnar play, *The Swan*, followed and those responsible for its selection and staging received as much praise as the cast. The presentation was compared favorably with the New York production in which Eva Le Gallienne had starred. Once again, the "large and fashionable audience" gave its unanimous stamp of approval on opening night. Lester Lonergan's vast experience reflected itself in the direction.³⁷ The "unusually effective staging" was a triumph. Also, Lillian Barrett was recognized as a "guiding genius of the theatre festival." It was the opinion of many that *The Swan* was the best play done at the Casino in the first two seasons.

Rose Hobart who was selected from a number of applicants "acquitted herself with consummate skill, looked and acted her role, and gave a finished performance" which contributed heavily to the success of *The Swan*.³⁸ Rollo Peters who "had a role more suited to his talents than in *Peter Ibbetsen* was capital and lifted the action to several highly dramatic moments." More stars were used in *The Swan* than any other production yet seen at the theatre. There was the "faultless Charles Croker-King," secured through the courtesy of the Shuberts; Frederick Warlock who "in a field of stars was among those who shone most brilliantly"; and Franz Bendtsen, Philip Tonge and the distinguished Polish actress

Maria Ouspenskaya whose work the audience remembered from *The Romantic Young Lady*.³⁹ Ouspenskaya stands out in her acting career. A member of the Moscow Art Theatre for fifteen years, she played altogether about 145 parts. During vacations of the acting troupe, she played summer stock. When Constantin Stanislavsky brought his Art Theatre to America (for the first time) in January 1923, Madame Ouspenskaya came with them where she played in *The Cherry Orchard*, *The Lower Depths*, *The Brothers Karamatsov*, *Ivanov*, *Uncle Vanya* and almost all the plays of their repertoire. Ouspenskaya became "exceedingly popular" in the Newport production of *The Romantic Young Lady* as the maid. The following fall she returned to New York and appeared as Curtis in *The Taming of the Shrew* throughout the season.

The Swan "took front rank" with the best the summer dramatic festival had yet to offer. The Casino had young talent beginning to appear at the theatre, many of whom were aspiring and au courant. Edward H. Wever, a newcomer to the Casino Theatre but one already "making an enviable name for himself in New York," played the role of the talkative cousin which he had in New York and repeated in Newport "with much success." Herschel Williams was another name new to the New York stage. Mary Howard of Newport appeared in her third Casino production, cast first as a lady and then as a maid, all the while adding to her stage experience.

Of the plays chosen for the festival, none was quite like the other. Care was taken so that those selected were all different. Meanwhile, the cost in obtaining the best possible actors was not a consideration. Of utmost importance in the minds of the management was that the Casino hire topnotch actors from varied and respected backgrounds. For example, Charles Trowbridge, who was a member of the original cast of *Craig's Wife*, was highly

successful as the captain in Shaw's *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*. The only female role was secured by Grace George through which she achieved her greatest *éclat* in the festival.

The period play marked a first at the Casino Theatre. It had been the custom to wait for the audience to be seated, the result being that it was midnight before the plays terminated. Promptly at nine o'clock of opening night, Shaw's *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* was underway allowing the final curtain to fall shortly after eleven P.M. "Not all were in their seats for the start, being accustomed to the delay," but the strict schedule was adhered to.⁴⁰ The opinionated and self-made Shaw would have approved of an occasion where his play forced the powerful and the mighty to adhere to someone else's rule. Among the reviewers, one thought that "if for no other reason, a visit to the Casino Theatre was worthwhile to see that warm favorite, Walter Kingsford, in action." Edward H. Wever, who staged the production, appeared in a role as well while France Bendsten continued to maintain the fine standard he had set in other plays.⁴¹ The Newport colonists' ardor for good theatre promoted an attitude of the best for whatever the price. The idea that nothing was too costly became the prevailing sentiment at the Casino. As with theatres of the past, the Casino existed first to satisfy the needs of a given group. The Newport Casino Theatre, above all, exemplified the primacy of class and money within a summer colony.

The usual capacity fashionable audience witnessed the premiere of I.M. Barrie's *The Admirable Crichton* featuring Frederick Warlock in the title role. This was the Casino Theatre's first play which included an additional matinee on Thursday. It was "presented with the completeness characteristic of the festival." Much of the play's success was attributed to the acting of Warlock who had won "a legion of admirers during his several productions" with the Theatre Festival. Selena Royle, Mary Howard and Rose Hobart had

roles as the daughters of Warlock's Earl of Loam, with Royle playing opposite him in the most important part. Mary Howard had her most significant role since appearing in the Casino plays, and that she upheld her own with such experienced actresses as Miss Royle, who had been featured in several productions and Miss Robart, who had the lead in *The Swan*," spoke for the advance Howard had made on the legitimate stage. Walter Kingsford as the Earl of Loam added to his string of successes" at Newport. Alison Bradshaw as Tweeneytt was easily one of the outstanding performances" in the play with much of the comedy falling to her. Special mention went to France Bendsten and Philip Tonge.

A second Alfred Savoir farce, *The Grand Duchess and the Waiter*, was unfaultlessly given^u by two respected stars of the theatrical profession, Violet Kemble Cooper and Basil Rathbone. The play was presented with the faultlessness which characterizes all Casino Theatre productions and won for Newport the title of queen of the summer drama.,⁴² Cooper, described as one whose home is really the stage," was accomplished to the last detail. Mary Howard headed the list of local amateur players who had minor roles, the others being Glenn Bissell, Vincent Hackett, Katherine Howard, Jane Arrol, Hazel Godwin, Powel Dawley, Paul Clifford and Colin McDonald.

George Kelly who had already secured success with two of his plays, *Craig's Wife* (a Pulitzer prize winner two years earlier) and *The Show-off*, was the final choice for the season. Kelly's *The Torchbearers* must have struck an amusing chord with the colony audience in particular. The subject of those who take themselves with undue seriousness in the staging of amateur theatricals, probably brought to mind some of their own histrionics while attempting to make a success of one of their fashionable dinner parties or light summer entertainments. *The Torchbearers*, a satire on the "little theatre" movement which

was springing up in various cities at the time, demonstrates the weakness of individuals when it comes to a question of the ability to act. A new star, Ethel Griffies, who had been seen in minor roles in several of the Casino plays, showed "every art a true star must possess" as Mrs. J. Duro Pampinelli, director of the amateur production. While others may have had parts equally important, it was Griffies who made possible most of the humor and brought about much of the laughter. Walter Kingsford won a "firmer hold on the followers" of the Casino Theatre festival. One admirer recorded that it was "doubtful if any of the various stars who have appeared have been more enjoyable than Mr. Kingsford, whose name is synonymous with clever acting."⁴³ Alison Bradshaw who played opposite Kingsford cleverly interpreted the role of Paula Ritter.

Others supporting whose names have repeatedly appeared in the Casino productions are Philip Tonge, France Bendsten and Mary Howard. Barbara Merriman, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Bruce Merriman of the summer colony "appeared to distinct advantage" as Jenny, the maid. A special word of mention went to Ben Webster, from the Theatre Guild, as the "able director" of the play who displayed "exceptional talent" which is required to "put over a clever comedy in a manner which makes everything look spontaneous."⁴⁴ The colony, many of whom were absorbed with public appearance and the art of display, identified with various personalities in the comedy. The play's lighter aspects were a fitting close to a festival which had its tense moments due to the loss of its founder and creative spirit, Moses Taylor. Following a nerve-stretching eight-week season, for what was only the theatre's second festival, a light choice was a good contrast to the season's sad beginning.

During this period more than any other in the theatre's history, the summer society became linked in their common ideal and purpose: the Casino Theatre as a theatrical

showplace. An illustration of the audiences' serious support of the theatre was evidenced by their response to a subscription sheet inserted into the (Tuesday) opening night's program. People were asked to indicate their support for the next season, and judging from the number of completed subscriptions, the interest for 1929 would exceed the 1928 season which was twice as great as the inaugural dramatic festival.⁴⁵ Living up to their reputation as the best society in America, the summer colonists, linked by an intense mutual interest in the Casino, functioned as a form of quasi-community when it came to the theatre's stability. Through their unsparing subsidy, the colony of Newport became a significant factor in shaping the early character of Bennett's theatrical creation. The colonists supported the entire Casino complex but endowed the theatre with a rich luxury, in particular, as their chosen place of entertainment. Their commitment to the theatre festival granted it a high place among other well-regarded resort theatres, namely, the Cape Playhouse in Dennis, Massachusetts, the Playhouse at Lenox, Mass., and the Boothbay Playhouse in Boothbay, Maine.

The Newport Casino company never toured but was a non-resident stock theatre that maintained complete artistic control while presenting hit plays. In general, the company retained apprentices while importing the main actors from New York. Privately owned by the wealthy stockholders of the Casino who had 'carte blanche' regarding the life of its theatre, the owners demonstrated both their interest and authority regularly. In September 1929, The Board of Directors (as elected members drawn from the stockholders) proposed a number of changes in the theatre building. William Vanderbilt, now president of the Company, conducted the meeting held with the Board members. Supporting Vanderbilt were Mrs. Edith Taylor, Lillian Barrett as executive director, Edith Wetmore (owner of

Bellevue Avenue estate, 'Chateau-Sur-Mer') and John Russell Pope who represented the theatre directors. At the meeting it was decided to extend the building thirty feet for two tiers of dressing rooms and a rehearsal room which was to be the same size as the stage. The roof was to be raised eleven feet to permit scenery to be raised and lowered. The total cost of adjustments was approximately \$15,000. Work was started immediately in order for the "enlarged building" to be ready for the season of 1930.⁴⁶

Prior to the completion of these adjustments, during the 1929 season, the Casino Theatre management continued with the choice of obtaining stars for their playhouse. The arrangement apparently worked for their own purposes as the actors appeared to be the strength of the theatre. Not only did each play serve as a vehicle to enhance the talents of a particular star, but it was a situation where the Casino audience was bent on sponsoring actors of a calibre that celebrated the wealthy's peculiar tastes and preferences. The undivided loyalties of the colonists both benefited the Theatre and satisfied their own ambitions. Out of their manifold contacts with assorted theatres throughout the world, the Casino votaries were desirous that the Casino be among those producing some of the new works which had recently debuted in New York. Through colony efforts the theatre gave voice to playwrights who showed promise of bringing esteem both to the profession and to the Casino.

Although *The Happy Husband* by Harrison Owen which opened the third season in 1929 was not an example of a distinguished play, it included a memorable cast of players that added to the bright image of the Casino festival. A better example was Somerset Maugham's *The Constant Wife*. The play, considered ultra modern because of its unconventional subject matter (a wife who leaves her husband), brought Chrystal Hume to

Newport. Heme had created the principal part in Maugham's sensation *Our Betters*, and her performance of the title role in *Craig's Wife* three years earlier (1926), which ran for an entire year on Broadway and a year on the road, was considered by the New York critics to be the finest achievement of that season.

Staged by Lawrence Eyre, one of the country's leading stage directors, *The Constant Wife* "merited a capacity audience for the rest of the week," and Heme made herself one of the "outstanding favorites of those who have appeared before play-wise and critical Newport audiences.,⁴⁷ A respected colonist, Mrs. Gardner Dunton, made her initial appearance at the Casino Theatre under the name of Miss Carol Perrin and continued to appear in future productions.⁴⁸ Dunton was an example of the preference shown the summer colonists by rewarding them acting roles at the Theatre, the list of which was not to be intruded on by ordinary people.

The fast-moving success of the Casino was turning out to be a high-powered theatre fest. Storywriter Roland Pertwee's, *Interference*, enabled A.E. Mathews "to present his talents to Newport audiences at his best." Livingston Platt's "futuristic set" made an effective background.⁴⁹ Mathews also directed this play. The disciples of I.M. Barrie were captivated by his latest offering, *The Legend of Leonora*. The play, which ran less than two hours, was the shortest given in three years at the Theatre. It featured Grace George as Leonora, the widowed mother of seven. and Charles Trowbridge as the bachelor captain of the English navy. The sets were by the "ever efficient" Livingston Platt. Edward Cooper "was outstanding" and Walter Kingsford, France Bendsten (who appeared in all eight plays), Ethel Griffies, Alison Bradshaw and Po\veL Dawley (of Newport) were "capital" SO The exceptionally able supporting players were commended by those whose level of

confidence often brimmed over into overindulgence. Not only did the fashion of the costumes appeal to the Casino audience, but the positive reaction to many of the actors was a boon to the theatre's image of fine taste and style, keeping in step with the Casino reputation.

This enthusiastic theatre community, competent through experience to adjudicate the best plays and players for their theatre encouraged the offerings of Broadway stage plays for each season. Their sponsorship pennitted a variety of selections from the world-wide offerings, while the advent of a Broadway production was the signal many times for the announcement of Standing Room Only. The press, favorable to a high degree, was not alone in urging attendance.⁵¹ The level of support offered by the colonists was of considerable value as they zealously maintained their allegiance to the Casino Theatre, and the money pledged, sweetened the deal.

The Casino name was becoming synonymous with a successful run. What its backers lacked in humility, they made up for in generosity which smoothed the course for obtaining nothing short of exactly what the management desired for its festival. The partnership between the Casino and the colonists was the backbone behind the hiring process. The unwritten law of paying for the higher echelon of actor was a trademark for which the theatre was becoming distinguished. Madge Kennedy who had just completed a two-year run in Philip Barry's comedy, *Paris Bound* (one of the outstanding hits of the 1927-1928 season in New York) was the star in the Newport production. When the play was announced as one of the Casino offerings for the 1929 season, it was predicted to be "one of the brightest spots in the program." The fact that it had a long run in New York most likely influenced its success in Newport and brought several new faces to the Casino

Theatre. Theodore St. John, Allen Vincent and Nedda Harrigan were actors of the class of the rank-and-file who were "steadily forging to the front" of the theatrical profession. And Mary Howard, a Newport native, returned. By this time, Howard was a member of Otis Skinners original company for *One Hundred Years Old*. which headed for New York the following fall. Gerald Cornell directed Barry's three-act comedy, and those who saw both the New York and Newport performances remarked that "the original play did not have so effective a setting as did the Casino offering" and that Livingston Platt's design "far outdid that used by the original company."⁵² The strong loyalty of the colonists had not been simply for outward show, an image tacked on for affectation, but rather it was a genuine expression of their dedication and devotion to something that they actually believed in and fully sanctioned. This small community openly supported its summer theatre which by this time had placed the Avenue as a focal point for entertainment and shopping.

Even though the colonists through their efforts and money were committed to supporting the Casino performers, it was not until Russian actress Eugenie Leontovich opened in *Enter Madame* that an actor drew the height of emotion from the Casino audience. Totally suited to the title role of prima donna, Leontovich kept the crowd awestruck. The admiration for her art permeated an opening-night audience which was seldom known for excessive demonstration of appreciation, yet "was so captivated that the Russian star had to acknowledge more curtain calls than have ever been accorded anyone in that channing playhouse."⁵³ The control which the actress held over her audience was compared to that of the inimitable Sarah Bernhardt. The applause given to Leontovich had known no equal at the Casino. "In the boxes patrons were stamping the chairs to add to the salvo of applause, and many others would have done so had not the chairs been fastened."⁵⁴

The sheer brilliance of the leading star broke all attendance records at the Casino. Enamored of **anything** foreign, the wealthy audience could be relied upon for its assured attendance and its enthusiastic reception of a European actor. Walter Kingsford, who played opposite to Leontovich in *And So To Bed* in its triumphal tour, played opposite to her again in Newport's *Enter Madame*. Gerald Cornell directed, and Livingston Platt designed the set.

The seventh in the series of presentations was *The Royal Family* which offered a slice of American theatre history. Written with novelist Edna Ferber in 1928, George S. Kaufman's half-mocking, half-affectionate tribute to the Barrymores, captured the reigning theatrical dynasty of its time. Lionel, John and Ethel Barrymore had each made a name in the serious theatre. The opening Newport audience, having knowledge of the Barrymore traits, mentally filled in the gaps of their biographies. Moving at a rapid rate from first to last, the play portrays a family which lived the stage, breathed the stage and was the stage in every fiber of their being. Affairs or careers may have attracted them temporarily, but the lure of the footlights was too strong. Three generations are represented, and for each there appears nothing but the stage. Violet Kemble Cooper and Otto Kruger shared the spotlight as the stars, and Ethel Griffies received praise which placed her on a par with the leads. A capable supporting cast lists Helen Kingstead (wife of director Gerald Cornell), Walter Kingsford, France Bendsten, Jessie Busley, Edward Cooper and Theodore S. John. Minor roles were played by Anne Anderson, Harold Webster, Murray Alper and Powel Dawley, from Newport.

Overall, the Casino Theatre was in earnest about advocating some of the new plays written, with *Paris Bound* and *The Royal Family* both appearing on its stage in 1929.⁵⁵ Although the theatre principally sponsored mainstream commercial plays, it made efforts to

give voice to new plays and innovative staging which otherwise might not receive a large audience outside of New York. The fact that the Casino Theatre employed many of the Theatre Guild's actors and designers may have influenced this observance since the Guild initiated a like philosophy in America. The wealthy colony's experimentation with new ideas, along with its first-hand knowledge of the latest and most talked about plays in New York, more than likely contributed to the practice of admitting playwrights who were awaking new thoughts. It is important to recall that individuals within the wealthy Newport colony were trendsetters in various fashionable circles. It seems logical to expect that these same people would stimulate new ideas in the playhouse which they had claimed as their own.

One of George Bernard Shaw's best known plays at the time, *Arms and the Man*, featuring Rollo Peters as Captain Bluntschli, was the last week's offering of the third summer festival. And even though it did not register with the "sure-fire click" of *Enter Madame* and *The Royal Family*, the Shavian devotees, as unswerving patrons of the Theatre, saw that the "attendance was all that may be desired."

During a period when some were questioning the future of theatre, Cornelia Otis Skinner, an American actor performing one-woman monologues that were unique to her time, appeared at the Casino Theatre.⁵⁶ Skinner, appearing alone on the stage in a variety of eight character sketches of her own devising, seemed to prove that people still had the same love for drama, if it is not cluttered with "clap-trap and cheap scenery, poor acting and conventional junk." Neither caricatures nor impersonations, these sketches were short plays, cameos of life. With the resources of a Belasco to fall back upon, the actress chose a plain black backdrop and few essential props. An endless number of characters filled her stage-

not impersonated, but implied - resembling more the Chamber Theatre of the 1970s and 1980s which drew directly on the imagination of the audience with its 'theatre of suggestion'. Skinners presentation on 5 September gave Newport an opportunity to see and judge the new art for themselves. Her experience with the Comedie Française while studying acting at the Jacques Copeau School in Paris, gave her a universal breadth and polish that appealed to a wide group of arbiters of the theatre. The Casino Theatre audience was especially gratified by Skinners poise and skill for "practically all the summer colony turned out to hear and applaud her."¹⁵⁷ With the consistent appearance of such actors as Skinner, the theatre festival demonstrated that the Casino was serious in retaining first-rate talent.

Little trace of a stock market crash which had taken place the previous October were detected at Newport as the usual eight shows were scheduled for the summer of 1930. Did the colony have such a surplus of money that their extravagance could continue uninterrupted, or was the Casino management operating at a deficit but keeping it to themselves? It is difficult to know since privacy often protected Casino business transactions. By now William Vanderbilt was president of the Theatre Company and Mrs. Moses Taylor was vice president. From all appearances, the Casino Theatre was not simply business as usual. The earlier plans for expansion were complete by this time, and the theatre was advertising its new addition which provided a larger workshop to accommodate the building and painting of scenery. The actors were busy securing for themselves one of the eight new dressing rooms made available, and the '*porte-cochere*,' (originally designed as a canopy for unloading wagons), had been enlarged so that three cars could be received at the same time, probably to expedite a prompt curtain call.

Gerald Cornell, who directed five of the former season's plays, had charge of all except *The Road to Rome* which was assumed by Lester Lonergan, director of the New York production. Dixon Morgan replaced Livingston Platt as scenic designer.⁵⁸ According to the Irish actor, Whitford who acted extensively throughout Europe and America, while with an organization called the Modern Drama Players at the Boston Toy Theatre, considered Platt as "the pioneer of the new scene designers." and was responsible for some lovely [set] backgrounds.⁵⁹ The festival opened in 1930 with James Fagan's *And So To Bed* featuring Eugenie Leontovitch and Ernest Cossart in the leads. The play was based on the Pepys diary, and Cossart who had been associated with the New York Theatre Guild for the past ten years played Samuel Pepys at Newport.⁶⁰

In response to a number of requests, the Casino Theatre Company decided to hold the weekly matinee performance on Thursday instead of Saturday. Several reasons prompted the change which met with the approval of William Vanderbilt. The adjustment would avoid conflict with the tennis finals and the Horse Show which took place on the Casino grounds "in addition to other Saturday features." It was suggested that there be Thursday and Saturday matinees, but the management refused because it was "considered too much for the actors."⁶¹ The decision reveals a watchfulness on the part of the Casino over the individuals who brought prestige and respect to an appreciated venture. The management knew that not only well selected plays but also good actors meant a successful run. In view of this, even strong actors whose strength was depleted by extended hours of performance in the heat of summer could chance diminished results. Some of the Casino members, also, had befriended many of the actors and presumably did not want to take advantage of the spirit of camaraderie that prevailed, overall.

The Newport audience had "waited for some years to see Alice Brady" and, in 1930, she finally appeared in Robert Sherwood's *The Road to Rome* with Melvyn Douglas appearing as Hannibal. Those who saw Jane Cowl in the play in New York, and Alice Brady in **Newport**, were of the opinion that "the [then] current Casino production was the better." Critical in their opinions regarding what they saw at the theatre and not shy about making these views public, the collective gathering of the more persuasive audience members had significant influence at the Casino.

Colony influence and what might appeal to them is exemplified in the third English play presented. John Drinkwater's *Bird In Hand* dealt with the class distinctions which ordinarily would be more familiar to English audiences than American. However, the audiences at Newport were clearly familiar with that which determined their status on the social ladder. Distinctions drawn between the classes at Newport were an everyday occurrence. Eugene Powers and Ernest Cossart were the featured players. Powers who had appeared with many of the leading stage people of the day was new to Newport audiences. A further evidence of preference given to the summer visitors in Newport is observed with the presentation of Alfred Sutro's English drawing room comedy *The Laughing Lady* with its contemporary London setting, which was fourth on the bill of the Casino Players. The play was given by what could be called an all-star cast, and a few details set it apart. The most important seemed to be the acting. For an opening night performance, the play was given with "a smoothness which might well be the envy of any company starting its second year's run in the play." It was reported to have been **given** in a manner to suit the most exacting tastes. A local newspaper records: "It is easy to build up too high hopes, but of this offering it can well be said that those who are planning to see it can look forward to an

evening of first class dramatic performance.,,62

Chrystal Heme (*The Constant Wife*) in the title role was "immeasurably better than in *Craig's Wife*.. even though she made that Pulitzer prize play outstanding." Charles Trowbridge, a favorite from other seasons.. returned to play the principal role opposite Heme, and "the reason for the combination is apparent as soon as one observed] them in action." Mary Howard returned to the same stage where she made her start, her natural acting ability "greatly bettered by her experience in several professional productions in New York." Ernest Cossart, Eugene Powers, Edward Cooper, Ethel Griffies, Helen Kingstead, Gerald Cornell (director) and France Bendsten were representative of the kind of acting talent the Casino routinely sponsored. Katherine Enunett, a newcomer to Newport, had just closed in *Jenny* with Jane Cowl. *The Swan* with Eva Le Gallienne was also among her successes. Emmett created the role of Mrs. Farr with Ethel Barrymore in the original production of *The Laughing Lady* and her performance in that play was set do\vn by the New York critics as the most distinguished of her career.⁶³ Gerald Cornell's direction of the Newport production had a great deal to do with the success of the play for which the Casino management was highly complimented.

Through its affiliation with the wealthy catalysts for social change, the Casino Theatre was in a position where it could rely on prodigious support from its financially more fortunate members. This type of assistance afforded the theatre management opportunity to plan the programs for each season without the drawback of undue money concerns. An endorsement from the financially articulate certified the Casino's latitude in this regard. The patronage at the Casino had a profound influence on the character of the theatre. If a play did not bring in a large sum of money, it brought the theatre into close

contact with many who, through their desire to see the plays continue, were generous in their donations to the theatre.

A descendant of a major figure of the London stage trained in the Bancroft-Irving tradition appeared in the Casino's *The Perfect Alibi*. A.A. Milne's murder mystery brought Sanchia Robertson (from the famed Forbes Robertson family of England) to Newport to play the principal female role. Just twenty, Robertson was one of the youngest to have a leading role at the Casino Theatre. In John Galsworthy's *Loyalties* an unusually large number of actors had important roles, and "to the credit of the management" were ably performed. Frederick Worlock, star of other years, returned to the theatre for his first performance that season. Melvyn Douglas, Helen Kingstead, Ernest Cossart and Eugene Powers were featured, while Ethel Griffies, Edward Cooper, Thomas Loudon, Oswald Marshall, Harold Webster and France Bendsten also appeared in the play.

Probably what was most interesting about opening night of Rachel Crothers's *Let Us Be Gay* was that the play went on without the scheduled lead. Henry Hull (*The Guardsman* and *Candida*), for reasons not disclosed, who withdrew the evening before the opening, and the strain on Francine Larrimore was so apparent that "she could not continue" with the Tuesday afternoon rehearsal. This put the Casino management in a difficult position. They phoned New York and secured the services of two men who had played Hull's part in stock only recently. "Neither was a Hull," but the management adhered to the spirit that the play must go on. The majority of the usual fashionable audience, which was increased because of the many visitors in Newport for tennis week, knew nothing of the adjustment except through a printed slip in the program which announced that Robert Lynn (selected from the two actors) would play the role of Bob Brown in place of Hull who would open the

following week in *Michael and Mary*. The choice of *Bulldog Drummond*, originally scheduled to be the Casino's fourth season finale, was abandoned when *AEMathe\vs*, "because of a previous engagement" was unable to appear in Newport. Consequently, *Michael and Mary* featuring Henry Hull and Edith Barrett who had "tear[ne]d together before on the [New York] stage" filled the final bill.

A significant discovery regarding the Bellevue Dramatic Club occurred in 1930 when Joseph Nevins, house manager of the Casino Theatre, discovered "in the files" a playbill of an entertainment reportedly given at the Theatre on 27 August 1880. The fact that the bill was "yellow with age" did not deface or obliterate its legend. It tells of an entertainment by the Newport Bellevue Dramatic Company and gives the two plays "a comedietta, *Withered Leaves* by Fred W. Broughton and a comedy in one act, *Book the Third, Chapter First*." The cast of *Withered Leaves* included Thomas F. Cushing, Wilson Eyre, Miss Jerome, Mrs Kay, Mr. Sturges and Miss Bessie Hunter, while the cast of the second play consisted of a Mr. Bedlow, Robert M. Cushing, and Mrs. Eyre all were Newport colonists. In recounting the event, the *Newport Daily News* writes that: "The entertainment by the Bellevue Dramatic Club was an entire success ..." Regarding the theatre, the *News* records: "The theatre itself is all that can be desired, not only commodious and well ventilated, but also cheerful, homelike and cozy, as a theatre in a Casino surely ought to be." Earlier it had been reported in the *Newport Daily News* on the following day of the performance (fifty years previous) that "the new theatre at the Casino was filled" and "every seat was occupied, for the most part by summer residents."

While conflicting reports exist regarding specifically when the theatre opened, most sources say that it was in June, 1881, six months following the completion of the complex.

However, others (mostly magazines) credit its opening as earlier. The newspaper account verifies the earlier date. The confusion may have occurred because even though the theatre opened its doors on 26 July 1880, adjustments were made to its interior while other buildings were being completed during the following January and spring of 1881. What further complicates the facts is the existence of a note attached to a Casino archival document. According to the note, it was ~~rumored~~ that in the excitement of the Casino's opening in 1880, a play had been scheduled for performance in the theatre prior to its completion (1881). Even though Stanford White pressed to have the play performed, James Bennett reportedly would not allow it. The owner wanted to wait until the ballroom/theatre building was finished.⁶⁵ It is possible that this is that performance. An article entitled "The Dramatic Entertainment," appearing in the *Newport Daily News* on 28 August 1880, obviates the later date since the newspaper claims the two one act comedies "as the 'first plays performed upon its stage.'" In speaking of the second comedy, the same source says that there were only three characters and identifies them as "three of the prominent members of the Bellevue Dramatic Club." The report goes on to say that the play was also "the first entertainment by the Newport Bellevue Dramatic Company."¹⁶⁶ Even though performances could have been for private viewing by the elite of the institution which would be in keeping with their customary behavior, it is clear that these two comedies were opened to the public.

The *Newport City Directory* of 1880 lists two brothers, a Thomas F. Cushing (of Boston and Bellevue Avenue) and a Robert M. Cushing (of Boston and Ocean Avenue) as villa owners in Newport and not simply renters which indicates that they were permanent summer residents in Newport.⁶⁷ The family estate still stands on Ocean Avenue along the

famous twelve mile drive. Bert Lippincott, reference librarian at the Newport Historical Society, confirms that the Cushman brothers belonged to the Bellevue Dramatic Club, an amateur colonist group of Newport players.⁶⁵ These individuals were among a number of society people well known to Newport fifty years earlier who entertained as a way of life. The Bellevue Dramatic Players were predecessors of the Casino constituency of the 1920s and 1930s. Their tribute paid to the art of the theatre gained for them a preeminence in Newport circles. The early colonists' theatrical avocation improved over the years by the addition of theatre professionals of the 1920s and 1930s. An argument can be made for the fact that the very people whom Bennett was relying on to make his project successful could easily have been among the first who used the theatre for their own purposes, some of whom were active in the Bellevue Dramatic Club. The discovery of 1930 playbill mentioned previously brings to mind the wealthy local persons who had sponsored paratheatricals in Newport, including Henry Bedlow who owned and advertised his own theatre called "The New Theatre." As was stated earlier in this dissertation, individuals involved with the paratheatricals who performed for the love of acting and for the satisfaction that it gave to their friends were among these same participants who sponsored the Casino Theatre from its earliest beginnings and were well known to the people of Newport fifty years previous.

The success that the Casino Theatre enjoyed, which contributed to making it a Newport institution, owed its life to the fidelity of the summer colony. In 1931, when *The Dover Road* opened the fifth season of the Casino's dramatic festival, an "audience reminiscent of metropolitan opera" once again proved it could be relied upon at a time when many who made up the former audiences were no longer attending. "All the boxes in the

theatre were filled, and members of the summer colony had most of the orchestra seats." As in the past, the colony continued to be the financial backbone of the theatre. Each season it could be relied upon as the Casino Theatre's outstanding advocate. Many of the stars were new each year but not the audience. With play after play, the faithfulness of the colony provided the appreciation and the funding that the management relied upon. Accustomed to good plays and the means to attain what they desired, the patrons helped the theatre enormously. Edith Taylor and Lillian Barrett customarily acknowledged their congratulations on the "fine opening performance" between the acts and after the shows. As a result of the type of patronage it enjoyed, the Casino Theatre was able to attract artists of renown whose remuneration was considerably higher than lesser talent could command.

Consequently, some of the new names seen at the theatre during the 1931 season were among some of the finest acting talent of those years. Constance Collier, Henry Stephenson, Tom Powers, Frieda Inescort, Ernest Glendenning, Harry Ellerbe and Marjorie Maude had already demonstrated a proficiency in their craft. Constance Collier played two of the roles she made famous in London, *Hay Fever* and *The Mollusc*. Henry Stephenson starred in *Petticoat Influence* the play in which he co-starred with Helen Hayes in New York the previous winter. Tom Powers, who helped make the history of the New York Theatre Guild, did *The Firebrand*. Powers also starred in *Pygmalion* at Newport with another Guild actor, Frieda Inescort.

By 1931, the Theatre appeared stable enough to have a number of ascending playwrights represented at the Casino. John Galsworthy's *The Pigeon* directed by Whitford Kane appropriately dealt with unemployment. Noel Coward, then one of the young English playwrights who met with unprecedented success, had his favorite play, *Hay Fever*,

produced. Edwin Justin Mayer, considered one of America's outstanding playwrights and long active as a screenwriter, filled the Newport stage with *The Firebrands* atmosphere of sixteenth-century Florence. *Firebrand* by Mayer, a writer of period plays, had one of the longest runs any play had ever had (at the time) in New York. Hubert Henry Davis whose works were better known in London than in America had his high comedy of *The Mollusc* on the Casino stage. Another author of greater prominence in London than here was represented with his drawing room comedy, *Petticoat Influence*. Four of the plays in the 1931 season were directed by Lester Lonergan and the others by Ernest Cossart, Edgar Kent and Thomas Loudon. Scenery was by Thomas Farrar, a scenic artist identified principally with the Charles Hopkins Theatre in New York.⁶⁹

Two new actors who opened in Milne's *The Dover Road* were Harry Ellerbe and Patrick Lee. Eugene Powers who played the lead had only one week in Newport when he had to leave for a New York rehearsal of the new Jed Harris production of *The Inspector General*.⁷⁰ Thomas Farrar's setting of *The Dover Road* was recognized as "exceptionally beautiful and authentic." The overall response led one of the local newspaper writers to comment "If there is a better place for the staging of summer plays with the elaborate setting of a New York production, it is not known.,⁷¹

Mary Michael, understudy for Katherine Cornell in *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* in New York made her first appearance in Newport in *The Pigeon*. The third offering, in 1931, was Sir James Barrie's *Mary Rose*. It had been presented in New York nearly ten years earlier with Ruth Chatterton and Tom Nesbit. The combination of mystery and fantasy with everyday reality, characteristic of a Barrie play, made this "the best at the Casino since its five years in existence." At Newport, Edith Barrett played Mary Rose. Barrett had been

recently "raised to stardom" by her manager Charles Hopkins which resulted in her becoming the youngest star on Broadway. Eric Dressler played the dual role of Rose's husband and son, the way Barrie specified it should be done.⁷² Edgar Kent, last seen four years earlier as Horatio in *Hamlet* at Moses Taylor's inaugural festival, directed *Mary Rose*. According to a reviewer, the Casino's next offering, *The Firebrand*, was presented as though the company had been giving it for a year. Another expressed it this way:

After viewing a play demanding so much work as *The Firebrand*, the wonder is not that the Casino players have the same unfailing success, which is now taken almost for granted, but that they are able to put it on at all. It requires many parts, several scenes and much costuming, and yet the summer festival here ably accomplishes in a week what others take months to achieve.⁷³

Tom Powers "who was in great demand" at the time performed Henry Higgins in Shaw's *Pygmalion*. Frieda Inescort took the role of Eliza Doolittle which was not new to her as she did it two years earlier (1929) in the Theatre Guild touring production.⁷⁴

Constance Collier presented a "finished performance" appearing as Judith Bliss in *Hay Fever*, a work that demonstrated Noel Coward's gift for inconsequential comedy. Not only as an actress, but as a stage director. playwright and author, Collier brought years of experience to the Casino stage.⁷⁵ In 1930 she had directed five plays. Carol Perrin of Newport who by this time drew on her stage work in New York was cited as having one of the outstanding performances in the play.

In 1931, in spite of an earlier claim to the contrary, the theatre resorted to giving two matinees, one each on Thursday and Saturday. In retrospect, one suspects that the financial difficulties were more pronounced than at first thought. The leading stars may have carried

the productions to success. Yet, at the same time, perhaps because of the types of actors appearing, those whose ability could transport in imagination an audience only too willing to follow, the expensive transactions contributed to the Casino's monetary shakeup. Since money was being spent as fast as it was donated, the Casino budget, threadbare by use, was weakened.

During this time of national financial setbacks, even in Newport it was becoming known that the secret to a play with a small cast was to have each of the few who took part be an actor of exceptional ability. At least this was the case with the leads shared by Constance Collier, Tom Powers, Margery Maude and France Bendsten. The four starred in Hubert Henry Davies's *The Mollusc* which was "so well interpreted by the cast that the leading producers could well put it on the New York stage without a single shift." Tom Powers's personality on the stage was reminiscent of Douglas Fairbanks's on the screen. These four made the cast, while an added touch, evident but not seen was the directing of Ernest Cossart. Little risk was involved with this production since the actors were masters of their art and repeatedly demonstrated a skill that could be relied upon. One might wonder if the choice of this play was financially motivated, especially since veiled references to financial trouble stirring at the theatre came as early as the end of the 1930 season.

With *Petticoat Influence* (1931) the Casino players broke into pure comedy as if doubling efforts to brighten the moments of the audience while at the Theatre. Henry Stephenson who had the same role with Helen Hayes the previous winter starred. Selena Royle returned after three years. Among her recent successes were the Players Club revival of *The Way of the World*, *Heat Wave* with Basil Rathbone and *The Merchant of Venice* with Paul Muni. It was Ernest Glendening's first time with the Casino Players, and Anne

Shoemaker, known for her intense interpretation in O'Neill's *The Great God Brown*, was also cast.

The Casino Theatre scored a decided coup in obtaining the American premiere of the new Somerset Maugham play, *The Breadwinner*, which had been running in London nearly a year. Following the Newport premiere in the first week of September, which was outside the subscription season, the play opened in New York and was considered the city's most ambitious and significant offering of that year's theatrical season. Newport's *The Breadwinner* had the largest gathering in five years. The play was presented by the Newport Casino Theatre Company through special arrangements with Messmore Kendall, producer. The Newport colonists entertained extensively with their box parties and dinners. Society member Schuyler L. Parsons had a dinner for Mrs. Messmore Kendall of New York, wife of the producer, after which he took his guests to the play. Mrs. Hugh D. Auchincloss had her theatre guests for dinner at Hammersmith Farm while Mr. and Mrs. William H. Vanderbilt held a dinner at Oakland Farm for the entire cast after the play.⁷⁶

The play's opening in London about a year earlier was playing to capacity audiences. Marie Lohr, who helped make it a success there, consented to come to America to take the same role. A.E. Mathews returned to Newport, after a two-year absence, in the title role where "his initial appearance was marked with applause which stopped the production for a full minute." Mathews characteristically carried on in a manner which "met the further approval of the fashionable audience."⁷⁷ Somerset Maugham who was planning to come over from England for the New York opening "made every effort to be here in time for the Newport premiere."⁷⁸ However, no written indication is available as to whether Maugham ever attended.

An innovation for America was observed in *The Breadwinner*. The action is continuous, with the curtain lowered twice to give the audience a rest. When the second act, so to speak, opened, a minute or two of the dialogue of the first act was repeated, and the same procedure was followed when the curtain was lifted for the third act. It was stated that the purpose was to be sure that the audience picks up the thread of the plot where it left off. The producers were not sure that this would be done in New York. It was being tested in Newport because "it was novel and worth trying in a city looking for the unusual.,⁷⁹ The summer colony's reputation of arriving late for a play and the habit of straggling in after an intermission could also have influenced such a practice. Although *The Breadwinner* concerns a member of the London stock exchange, the crisis is based on the Wall Street crash. After the final Casino performance, the play went to New Haven's Shubert and on to Bridgewater before opening in New York 21 September at the Booth Theatre.

In those days, more than ever, producers realized that merit and ability were essential in taking a production to the New York stage. Therefore, the entire cast of *The Breadwinner* had been chosen for its "fitness." In years gone by producers used to select Newport as the testing ground for new productions, the saying being that, if it was successful here, there would be no question about New York liking it.⁸⁰ The Casino was fortunate in securing the premiere of *The Breadwinner*. At the same time, there may have been other reasons for the decision which were never publicized. Was the theatre in trouble financially and this was an effort to draw the crowds in greater numbers? By now, the impact of the 1929 crash was having deleterious effects on many of the wealthy. A few families who had been stalwarts of the Casino Theatre managed to persevere longer than those of less exclusive means. The Vanderbilts and the Astors, the last in a long New York

Society line, were among those who could still lend substantial support to the Casino theatrical enterprise without suffering irreversible financial harm.

That the Casino Theatre would schedule a play outside its regular summer season might indicate the ambitious spirit that characterized it from the outset. And since the colonists were remaining at their summer homes later into September, it could be understood that the Casino was taking advantage of an opportunity to keep the place well attended. However, the decision could also have been a signal that financial adversity was on the horizon and that the premiere of an author well received throughout the country could be viewed as one solution to the difficulty.

For all that may have troubled the theatre, as in past seasons, the stars in the 1931 Casino productions were for the most part the same who had carried them to success in New York and London. In fact, the Casino Players included in their list many who had helped make the history of the New York and London theatres. For five years the Casino Theatre Company was composed strictly of professionals including actors, producers, directors, designers and stage technicians. Certain individuals like Mary Howard and Carol Perrin, who were amateur actors, were admitted, but even they were members of the wealthy summer colony. It appeared that few Newporters ever managed to break into the close group which had secured a name for itself synonymous with membership in an exclusive club. Although snobbery existed in the colony circle, the theatre itself managed to open its doors to those of talent and good reputation in the theatrical world. The Casino Theatre had sustained a core of well known actors each season while admitting rising new names who had varying degrees of stage experience, mainly in New York and summer stock.

The wealthiest of the summer circuits in the United States by 1932, the Casino Theatre was still able to attract not only foremost stars of Broadway but also individuals of high executive experience. Dora Chamberlain, six years with the subscription department of the New York Theatre Guild and treasurer of the Martin Beck Theatre took over the Casino box office. Jack Quigley, advance manager of the Abbey Players during their American tour of thirty-three weeks and assistant director of *Troilus and Cressida*, the Players' Club annual revival of 1932, acted as company manager in Newport for his second season. Also in her second season, Frances Hemot returned as stage manager. Retaining scenic designer Thomas Farrar was evidence that the theatre management intended to abide by its well earned reputation of performances in as excellent a background as the original productions. Whitford Kane, an Irish actor who toured extensively in the United States at this time, directed all the productions.

During the 1932 season, efforts were made to interest the people of Newport to an even greater extent than before to ensure a continuance of the theatre. The management received requests for certain plays or types of plays where it weighed the suggestions against what was practical. Owing to the demand for American plays, the season opened with *June Moon*, Kaufman and Ring Lardner's story of America's Tin Pan Alley from which the great song writers of the day had emerged. During this time, *June Moon* was the most typical and outstanding product of the American playwriting world. Four members of the original cast, Lee Patrick, Edith Van Clever, Frank Ono and Leo Kennedy, were engaged to play their old parts. As a contrast to *June Moon* and in answer to the appeal for a Shaw play, *Man And Superman* was chosen as the second offering. The production introduced Newport to Robert Loraine, the original creator of the role of John Tanner in this country and in

England. Critics Alexander Wollcott from the *New York Times* and Edgar Wallace at the *London Morning Post* thought the actor to be the best of his generation while Brooks Atkinson likened Loraine's acting to 'a blast of flame.'¹⁵¹ Shaw himself had written of Loraine's *Cyrano de Bergerac* that it was the most moving piece of acting he had ever seen. And Loraine's performance of Strindberg's grim tragedy *The Father* was hailed by the London critics as the finest piece of acting of his generation.¹⁵² In the mood of light summer comedy *There's Always Juliet* with only four in the cast followed Loraine's outstanding talent. The fourth offering written by Harold Brighouse of England's Manchester School was *Hobson's Choice*. It was directed by Whitford Kane who was the original William Mossop, the hero of the play, when it was first produced in New York in 1916. B. Iden Payne who directed the New York production also acted in the Casino's 1932 *Man and Superman*. George Jean Nathan, the most caustic critic of his day, considered *Hobson's Choice* "one of the most comic, slyly amusing, human plays ever written."

One of the most popular plays to date at the theatre was H.M. Harwood's *The Man in Possession*. Prominent star on the stage and screen, Violet Heming, made her initial Newport appearance. With a stage ancestry that went back to Shakespeare's time, Heming had taken major roles in various types of productions. She was leading lady for George Arliss in *Disraeli* and played with him a year earlier (1931) in the film, *The Man Who Played God*. *Man in Possession* had what it took to make good at Newport. *Caprice*. its record among the Theatre Guild's successes broken only by *Strange Interlude*, played seventh at Newport. The Casino Theatre was granted a special release to produce Edward Childs Carpenter's *Whistling in the Dark*, a story of the American underworld, which had just closed a season's run in New York and was to reopen there again in the Fall. As the last

play of the Casino season, it served to "whet the appetite of an appreciative audience for the resumption of the plays, so important a part in the Newport season...."⁸³ Burford Hampden, Paul Harvey and Katherine Krug (*Hobson's Choice*) were featured players. During 1932, its sixth season, the Casino sold 1,000 tickets each week at \$1.10 per ticket. Other prices ranged from \$5.50 to \$1.65, and those attending Molnar's *The Play's The Thing* adapted by P.G. Wodehouse managed to produce the money to attend.

Yet, the main attraction for the 1932 season was the return after two years to the Casino stage of Cornelia Otis Skinner. Skinner's fame was such that the "entire house was quickly sold and she would have filled a larger theatre." This second visit by one preeminent in her field proved the pluck of the Casino Theatre management in risking to keep some of the best actors coming through its stage doors. Skinner's program was in two parts, the first, a group of five character sketches, three of which she presented on her last visit in 1930, and the second, five scenes in the life of Empress Eugenie, also the actress's own work. What made the performance more memorable was that the Empress Eugenie interpretation was given for the first time in America at the Newport Casino. Some months earlier Skinner premiered the piece at London's Covent Garden.

The stockholders of the Casino were the ones who decided whether the theatre project continued for another year. Admittedly, 1932 "was an off year" throughout the country so far as theatres were concerned due to the pervasive hardships radiating from the Depression. With this knowledge, Mrs Moses Taylor organized a citizens' committee in order to find ways to encourage "the townspeople" to support the theatre. As the new president, she was in a position to recognize the extent of the need for Newport's support if the endeavor were to continue. The citizens' committee chaired by William P. Clarke was

later augmented by a women's committee. Together they raised "more than \$6,000 in season subscriptions" which proved a valuable sum and a decided help in keeping the theatre going. By this time the Casino management had informed the stockholders that the theatre was losing money, but the overall feeling was that the summer dramatic festival was "too important a feature of the Newport summer season, both for the summer visitors and the townspeople, to cease after six years of operation."⁸⁴ Unwavering in their commitment to the project initiated five years earlier, the colonists seemed determined to maintain the Casino Theatre as a tribute to themselves. Another encouraging fact was that when an appeal was sent to the public asking them to subscribe for the next year, the returns were unusually large and much greater than expected, demonstrating that the audiences were anxious to have the plays continue. Regardless of the warning signs, still optimistic concerning the potential of their playhouse, the nation's richest individuals personally took charge of what was a boon to their prestige and economic status.

Since its inception, the Casino seems to have shaped the colony enclave into a society of shared tastes, values and attitudes which resulted in an economic corporate presence that presided over and governed the complex. The colonists' unabashed involvement in Bennett's intellectual property succeeded also in making them recipients of its prosperity. Harold Clurman, writing some years later about one of the goals behind the establishment of the Group Theatre, states that "a theatre in our country should aim to create an Audience. When an audience feels that it is really at one with a theatre; when audience and theatre-people can feel that they are both the answer to one another, and that both may act as leaders to one another, there we have the theatre in its truest form."⁸⁵ Clunnam's recollection of his own theatre's significance seems an apt description of the

Casino Theatre's developing history. Symbolically, for the summer residents, the Casino Theatre furnished a more highly voltaged life, one that supported their ultra-stylish ways and reconfirmed the attitude that this was the place that would foster the type of life that suited them.

Although it had been a difficult decision, the company decided it could commit to another season provided that the advance subscriptions and contributors to the 'guarantors fund' were sufficient, and that concessions were secured from the stagehands' union. By this time the roles of leadership at the theatre had shifted. The Casino stockholders re-elected Mrs. Moses Taylor president and W.H.Vanderbilt vice-president. Another citizens' committee was formed to secure subscriptions through the winter months, as was done in 1932. While running the theatre in the 1932 season, the directors had decided upon a number of economy measures, which cut down receipts, but certain expenses could not be avoided. The attempt in 1933 was not to have these recur. The belief was that should the subscriptions from the townspeople be as great, and the receipts from the summer colony increase, the receipts for the 1933 season would even more nearly approximate the expenses.⁸⁶ Dependence on the donations of the theatre patrons continued to be essential. Despite the fact that money was being lost, the outward appearances were upbeat as many new stars and featured players was scheduled for the 1933 season.

Noteworthy among the group were screen star Irene Purcell, French actress Suzanne Caubaye, Gale Sondergaard, a beautiful actress of the American stage, Percy Ames, Percy Waram, Burgess Meredith and Katherine Hall, all with brilliant records. Perhaps even more interesting to the Newport public was the return of many of the old favorites. Henry Hull, Harry Ellerbe,⁸⁷ Mary Michael, Charles Romano, Reynolds Evans and Thomas Loudon.

Four prominent players associated with the Theatre Guild-Minna Phillips, Ernest Cossart!, his daughter, Valerie Cossart and Edgar Kent-returned for a second summer at the Casino. Kent, who spent two seasons playing in Guild productions, came to America from England as a leading man for Mrs. Patrick Campbell, acting with her first in her repertory and then returning when she brought Shaw's *Pygmalion* here.⁸⁸ Melville Burke was hired to direct all the 1933 productions. Called by a writer in *Theatre Arts Monthly* "one of the most creative directors in the American theatre," Burke had a long record of Broadway successes to his credit.⁸⁹

Again, a reading committee was formed headed this time by Edith Wetmore; Mrs. Moses Taylor, Richard Gambrill and Lillian Barren were also members. In search of a balanced bill to appeal to all classes of play lovers, the committee selected the eight plays for the season. Ernest Glendinning son of John Glendinning, a noted British actor, returned as guest star in the principal male role of Scotland Yard detective in Edgar Wallace's mystery thriller *Criminal-at-Large*.⁹⁰ Reservations for the first night of the 1933 opening managed to exceed those of several seasons. For the most part, the same who contributed to the benefactor's fund reserved the opening night boxes.

Middle Watch was an appropriate choice for the Casino audience because of its nautical story and naval background. Interestingly, all of the Casino's English-born actors were in this farce comedy. It was presented with the "polish expected of Melville Burke, director, and the combination of professional talent which has[d] made Newport stand out as a summer theatre stronghold.,⁹¹ Irene Purcell, recently returned to Broadway after two years in film, was outstanding in *Aren't We All* at Newport.⁹² During an interview, Purcell commented that "anyone who can come and act in this beautiful theatre is a privileged

person." She expressed a gratification in appearing at the Casino and added that "in New York it is the ambition of every actress to play a guest starring engagement at Newport.,⁹³ With figures like Basil Rathbone, and Edgar Kent before him, Purcell was another choice representative of a number of cultivated performers whose solid acting experience placed the theatre squarely in the midst of the professional. Those involved loved their theatre and filled its stage with the best that they could find in the world of acting. From the standpoint of many actors, Newport was still the acme of cultural perfection that could offer a good testing ground which afforded critical appraisal and a pleasant environment.

Public yearning for accomplished actors was assuaged by *The Late Christopher Bean*, Sidney Howard's adaptation of a French comedy that reintroduced Thomas Loudon, long associate of John and Ethel Barrymore.⁹⁴ The play was done in a manner reflecting "utmost credit on the author, the players and the direction.,⁹⁵ Newport audiences had particular interest in seeing Vera Allen in the sophisticated comedy *The Command To Love* because she was soon to star in the screen version of local author James Gould Cozzens's novel. Allen had come directly from Hollywood where she was preparing for the lead female role opposite Will Rogers in the film version of Cozzens's *The Last Adam*. Suzanne Caubaye, distinguished French actress and god-child of the immortal Sarah Bernhardt, appeared as guest star in the comedy *Her Cardboard Lover*. Caubaye debuted as a child in Bernhardt's company in France. The emotional appeal, benchmark of the Bernhardt school, was strongly developed by Caubaye. Her appeal captivated the colonists, many of whom had the experience of seeing Bernhardt on the stage. As with every guest star who appeared at the Casino, Caubaye had a strong supporting cast chosen from a well selected company. The last play scheduled within the season came from Providence-born George M. Cohan.

The Baby Cyclone was an event in Newport. Most popular of all the plays on the stock lists, the farce played to a packed Newport house. Taylor Holmes was the featured comedian.

For the first time in its history, the Newport Casino Theatre presented a new play, in 1934, under its own management, an adventurous step taken considering the sobering circumstances facing the management. Director Melville Burke and the Casino play-reading committee selected *The Man in the Zoo* from more than three hundred unpublished manuscripts. The choice ended several months of activity on the part of the committee. Burke described it as the best play he had found in three years of intensive play-reading, and "considered its production for the first time on any stage at Newport a theatrical event of the greatest importance."⁹⁶ The motivating force behind the choice was that the play of Yale graduate and student of George Pierce Baker, Jerome Ross, based on an original story by David Garnett, author of *Pocahontas*, had something new in it. The novelty of the plot offered an interesting experiment to the public which resulted in increased ticket sales. Since the production required in excess of thirty players (more than twenty-five appeared in the scenes at the London Zoo), it was the most elaborate of the 1934 season. Burgess Meredith in the title role exceeded his successes earlier in the season at the Casino. *The Man in the Zoo* was "done well enough by a competent Casino cast, handicapped by less than a week's rehearsal of a brand-new play." It was acknowledged that it could be done even better if the Casino company or "if any other equally good" had more time.⁹⁷ The engagement confirms the management's attempts to excel despite the fact that, with its striving, it may have overreached the budget goals.

By 1933, the financial setbacks of the 1930s were being felt severely by America's theatres. Plays had been losing their "old-time vigor in the larger cities," and for that reason

producers were on the alert for the kind of performance which would create a run on Broadway. New ideas that would stir thought and discussion drew close attention of producers and directors. Jerome Ross attended opening night at the Casino.⁹⁸ A first performance is always an historical event for both the actors and the audience. There was that seldom heard Newport cry of "Author" at the conclusion of a dynamic ending third act, and an acknowledging bow by Ross who was seated ~~with~~ Mrs. Moses Taylor. According to the newspapers, numerous theatrical managers and celebrities from New York were present at every performance. The success of *The Man In The Zoo's* world premiere at the Casino Theatre influenced David Garnett to have it staged in New York.⁹⁹ Garnett had "consented to its production only at Newport." But so much praise was given by visitors to the performance staged under Melville Burke's direction that a Broadway production was scheduled for the following fall.

When the curtain fell at the final performance of the play, it marked the close of the seventh, and in several ways the most daring season of the Newport Casino Theatre. The eight plays presented had exhibited not only a wide variety of dramatic writing but also a determination on the part of the theatre management to uphold its standards of previous seasons. Despite the dreary outlook of the theatre's future, the performances and productions reached an even higher standard than before under the able guidance of Melville Burke, the managing director.

The Casino Theatre's success had been in large measure due to the outstanding support of the summer colony. The theatre was the one thing that drew its collective efforts. Although the Casino Theatre festival may be defined as a self-flattering endeavor, at the same time, it elicited dedication from individuals otherwise self-centered and isolated in

their competitive lifestyles. The colony had created a theatre which reflected its own existence. If any single institution in Newport could define what this group actually stood for within the community, it was the Casino Theatre.

Following the conversion of the ballroom into a regular theatre, in 1927, the colony invented its own theatrical aesthetic at Newport. This obsessively worldly audience sought to see its own world recreated in the Casino playhouse. The Casino Theatre dedicated itself to satisfying the whims of the small but fashionable audience. Behind the proscenium was another world, one in which the privileged class held sway. It was as if the stage action became an extension of a larger reality, one which touched the core of the colonists' self-definition. The illusionistic, picture-framed stage was not so far removed from the actions of those in the audience. The colonists' taste for spectacle, frivolity and social glitter bolstered by a spirit of carefree spending could be summed up in the theatre. Temple Casino became the material representation of the social and psychological life of this group.

The Theatre had become a sanctuary in which the summer colonists could take refuge from the constraints of their everyday protocol. Bored by the rules of conduct regulating their social encounters, they retreated to the place from which they could anticipate a departure. The Casino Theatre offered an informal setting where the group could relax and experience a release from the usual daily interactions which for the most part were solemnly rigid. The cathartic moments that the theatre provided offered a valued change of pace for the socially audacious and furnished a freedom not easily granted those bearing the burden of public scrutiny.

As with any culture where the theatre thrives, the Casino theatre filled certain needs. If the Greeks had their gods and the Christians their liturgy to define and help make sense of

existence, similarly, the summer colony worshipped the means that gave meaning to their lives. These people expressed their reality through the experience of the Casino Theatre, even though broader cultural influences beyond their control would change the structure of reality as they knew it. Until that time, however, the vintage years of the Casino, where money mingled with talent, crystalized a situation that made it possible for a pampered generation to hold rich ceremony.

Although the colonists were not theatre professionals, they ran their theatre adeptly. From the start, a sophistication characterized their business transactions. Even in 1934, when Lillian Barrett signed a contract where the Casino Theatre was made to adhere to a recently adopted code to protect union workers, she did so with dignity and acquiescence. Having to hire more union workers placed additional pressure on the theatre funds. The "feather bedding" of the unions was fast paralyzing any autonomy the theatre had previously enjoyed.¹⁰⁰ The obligation to comply with union-regulated salaries and working conditions diminished the management's independence. Eventually, under the heavy burden of expenses, even subsidy from the colony proved insufficient. When Lillian Barrett, as the theatre's official representative, signed a contract with the *International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employers and Moving Pictures Operators*, local 309, she conceded to outside pressure, a step which financially strapped the management. The fact was becoming clear that the theatre was in peril. For the first time in its history, the Casino Theatre had to battle publicly a new reality: the shortage of funds.

That same year, in quiet desperation, the Board of Directors formed still another type of citizens committee to study the response and attitude of people regarding the Casino Theatre productions. Season subscriptions were "somewhat behind last year at this time"

and continued efforts were made to promote the ticket drive. In order to stimulate subscriptions, the plan of offering preferred seats to season subscribers, a practice started in 1932, was meeting with success. To prevent an already serious financial situation from worsening, the committee extended this arrangement to more people in 1934.

This was the first year that both the actors and executive staff arrived in Newport for "preliminary work" two weeks before production of the first play, a practice avoided until now. All the plays of the 1934 season were directed by Edgar Kent who had arrived even earlier with his wife. After five weeks of careful study, Lillian Barrett, executive secretary of the company, and members of the theatre directors selected Kent. The actor-director was no stranger to the Casino. In addition to acting in *Hamlet*, the first Casino Theatre production, Kent had directed several of the plays in 1931. Kent, one who had particular fondness for the Casino Theatre, could be a reliable choice during these difficult times. The fact that Carlton Miles was hired as publicity director for the second consecutive season indicated the theatre's plan for skilled and organized advertising. The popular-priced matinees continued on Thursday and Saturday. The first mention of a gala opening scheduled for first night of *Ten Minute Alibi* signified that the management was looking mainly to the colonists for additional financial benefactions. To ameliorate the situation, an unusually large advertisement was taken out in the *Newport Daily News* announcing the international dramatic thriller.

Her Master's Voice, latest comedy by Clare Kummer, which ran at the Plymouth Theatre in New York all season and was being made into a film was the second bill at Newport. Cora Witherspoon made her first Casino appearance as Aunt Min. Witherspoon had created prominent roles in new plays on Broadway in support of such stars as Leo

Ditrichstein, Henry Miller, Ruth Chatterton, Marie Dora, Ina Claire, Ethel Barrymore, Grace George and Tallulah Bankhead.¹⁰¹ The earlier presentations of Clarence Dane's *Bill of Divorcement* served only to increase its drawing power at Newport.¹⁰² George Coulouris (*Ten Minute Alibi*) was "prevailed upon to remain for this production" and complied. Percy Warram, from an old English theatrical family, whose ancestor, Mrs. Glover, was a famous British actress and the first woman to play Hamlet on the stage, also appeared.¹⁰³ Frances Starr probably one of the most famous of all the Belasco stars at the time was the "principal magnet who drew the large audience."¹⁰⁴ Mary Michael's only Casino appearance of the season was in J.M. Barrie's *What Every Woman Knows*. Michael had been acting all year in the Theatre Guild's production of *Mary of Scotland* with Helen Hayes, Helen Menken and Philip Merivale, and at a special matinee took Hayes's role as Mary.

Mary Hone, one of the new leading women of the Broadway stage, represented the younger acting generation at the Casino Theatre which appeared to make newer stars better known.¹⁰⁵ The practice of choosing its actors from some of the best New York had to offer was never abandoned even in these uncertain times. Sutton Vane's fantasy drama *Outward Bound* which Alexander Woolcon called "one play in a thousand" proved a good choice. Those in the audience who had seen it ten years earlier in New York "recalled it as a theatrical event." Still a crowd pleaser, it became the most significant play on the season's program. Victor Wittgenstein and Sheridan Gibney's *Encore*, originally used as a starring vehicle for Ethel Barrymore, brought the return of French actor Suzanne Caubaye who had promised to play again in Newport.¹⁰⁶ *Art and Mrs. Bottle*, Benn W. Levy's comedy with its undercurrents of serious thought, was well received. An "excellently chosen cast did much to make it an outstanding success, with Edgar Kent at his best in directing." Gale

Sondergaard and Percy Waram, the featured players, equaled expectations, yet the supporting cast was distinctive in its performance. The versatility of Harry Ellerbe was celebrated in *Goodbye Again*. His many appearances on the Casino stage were acknowledged during Ellerbe's fourth season with the Casino Theatre Company.¹⁰⁷ As was the practice, the colonists had filled the house on all opening nights of the final season of the theatre festival.

In an effort to bring something original to **Newport**, the theatre management sponsored outside the subscription season three performances of a native African opera. *Kykunkor* (The Witch Woman), a story in three acts, is bound together by dances and music from authentic African sources. The combined African folklore drama and opera brought to Newport the original company seen on Broadway including principals, singers, dancers and native musicians. However, there was nothing of Broadway or Harlem about *Kykunkor*. Most of the cast were directly from African tribes and spoke no English. Asadata **Dafora**, author, director and leading man, spent years in his native Africa collecting material which resulted in the work that made its way from a New York attic to one of the larger theatres.¹⁰⁸ Leading critics praised the drama as "an exciting, frenzied and compelling opera," and artistic New York saw the enthusiasm for the piece as "unequalled since the advent of the Russian ballet."¹¹ Newport was the only showing outside the New York metropolitan area. The opening night's audience at the Casino Theatre "was not all it should have been from the point of numbers." What it lacked in size, however, it made up for in appreciation. In a public statement the management acknowledged that unless the performance of the **African** ritual drama was "well patronized," the Theatre's future "may be seriously jeopardized.,¹⁰⁹ In sponsoring the engagement, it was the hope of the Casino

management that support would be given to merit the expenditure and efforts. Although not the attraction as expected or ~~needed~~, *Kykunkor* added lustre to the theatre's record.

In as many ways as possible, the management maintained the integrity that Moses Taylor eight years earlier had built into the festival. After five weeks of study in New York, Lillian Barrett and members of the theatre directors had chosen and carefully arranged plays which would provide variety and appeal to all tastes. In 1934, which would be the theatre's last season under colony management, the list of plays included two of the current successes of the past winter, *Ten Minute Alibi* and *Her Master's Voice*; four of the outstanding successes of past years, *Outward Bound*, *What Every Woman Knows*, *Bill of Divorcement* and *Art and Mrs. Bottle*; one musical play, *Encore*, which had played on tour although not yet reaching New York; and a new original offering. However, even with the firm efforts of the Casino management to keep its theatre operating as usual, the inevitable was to play itself out within a short period.

During the worst socio-economic breakdown in American history, Newport's wealthiest had barely altered their reckless spending habits. By now, however, the lure of vanity and fashion was taking its toll on the high income bracket whose purses were no longer well-lined. The splendid wealth they had enjoyed was spoiled by an economy wracked by instability and loss. The same individuals who had **given** their time and resources to the theatre had to forfeit at least its management. The group of colonists had formed the Casino Theatre Company and kept it going several years at an annual loss of many thousands of dollars before finally turning it over to career-trained personnel.

When the Casino Theatre opened in 1935 under the aegis of the Actor Managers, Inc., a professional group from New York, the colonists' stamp was no longer visible. When

Laurette Taylor appeared in the first production, the cast at Newport was not the original New York one as had been the custom under the management of the colony. The theatre was no longer an extension of the lives of those who for eight years had immersed themselves in its success. Despite the fact that the summer colony was financially faltering under the economic wreckage of the 1930s, the Casino Theatre's life was far from over. When executive director Helen Arthur, former head of the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York, became the new overseer, the heaviest subscriptions were still those of the Newport colonists.^{11D} When the press notices announced a four-week season in August only, however, it was clear that the theatre was in jeopardy. Bankrupt of hope to continue managing their theatre, the colonists still backed its survival.

For eight summers the Casino had flourished as a legitimate theatre. The money subsidized by the colony afforded the best of the professional stage. No cost was spared the little Theatre on the Avenue for purposes obvious both to its members and the public. The main strength of the theatre during these years appears to have been in its balance of casting. An excellently chosen company did much to make the Casino an outstanding success. However, rather than placing exclusive emphasis on an outstanding star to the detriment of the other actors, a practice which in later years would contribute to the demise of the theatre, the emphasis was on ensemble acting. The tightly **grouped** company had top-flight actors and those less known who were inching their way to a higher visibility. Some were trained in the classical school with its more extroverted style, while others came out of the modern realistic "method" movement.¹¹¹ Although these two acting styles often are described as conflicting, at Newport they became complementary rather than antagonistic. What was different about the Casino Theatre now was that the company no longer was the strong core

of factors it had been while under the private management of the colony.

While under colony control, the Casino Theatre drew from the international repertory, mixing some of the best new works with revivals, although mainstays of the theatre were many of the light comedies and romantic dramas dominating the era. Among the dramatists sponsored by the Casino, Ferenc Molnar was an example of one who stood aside from the trend toward Expressionism at the time. Molnar's farces and fantasies that had some vogue between the Wars were among the works that were successful at Newport. Others as different as Shaw and Barrie, Shakespeare and Maughan piqued the tastes of the audience. In 1927, when the Stanford White ballroom was transformed into a legitimate theatre, the plays that were sponsored included those as different as ones authored by A. A. Milne, Sidney Howard, George Kaufman and Noel Coward. Yet, the Casino-sponsored plays were not simply the perfect antidote to the woes of the ~~world-wide-Depression~~, as might be assumed, as much as they were a confirmation of a group set apart. The Casino members were not just filling up the leisure hours but had constructed a forum for the specific purpose of relaxation and privacy which played a distinct importance in their lives. As a vehicle for escape, the theatre festival can be seen as an outlet for the self-expression of those whose lives strained against conventional rules that encroached on their determination for freedom and against a tradition that kept them locked into an unbending decorum. The theatre became an enclosure that fostered an 'esprit de corps' among its collaborators. For these society people, who were a provocation in the minds of some, there was no middle ground. Caught up in the excitement that the theatre provided, the marrow of which nurtured their lifestyles, the theatre infused a living drama into their own lives and added variety to their choices.

During these years, the Casino theatre gave momentum to actor-respectability as well. Although there are occasional recordings of society snobbery toward the actors, for the most part, the performers were looked up to and admired for the gifts that they demonstrated. In an environment of the Casino stockholders' type, wherein wealth afforded indulgence, the actors became targets of prestige. Many were invited into private social circles through parties and various other orchestrations of high society. Experienced enough to judge good talent, the colonists gravitated toward those who brought finesse and a model of excellence to their theatre. Those born into theatrical families such as Violet Kemble Cooper, Basis Rathbone, Cornelia Otis Skinner, and Suzanne Caubaye and Violet Hemming were especially catered to. Also, to be foreign born and in Newport, fostered attention out of the ordinary, particularly at the Casino. In addition, preference was given to individuals from the Newport colonist families by making available to them the more prominent minor acting roles while others were irredeemably treated as outsiders. Regardless of this situation, a few individuals of whom Mary Howard and Carol Perrin qualify, displayed talent on a level that even discerning New York recognized.

To some, the Casino Theatre was considered to be a designers' theatre as well. A number of scenic artists who possessed the technical talent that matched the standards of artistic excellence found in other areas of the productions was sought. Livingston Platt set the example. As one who "avoided the awkward, pseudo-realistic settings then fashionable," Platt "designed stylized settings whose use of a double proscenium allowed nearly instant changes. These he lit with striking imagination."^{U2} The hiring of Platt and designers such as Thomas Farrar whose reputation was respected in larger artistic circles and later Dixon Morgan and William Ruge, employed by the Casino during these early

years as a regular theatre was significant. As practitioners they espoused careers devoted to excellence in staging which proved the Casino's need to employ proven artists in their field who would add to the reclame of their theatre.

To a degree, the scenic dimensions became as important a part of the Casino Theatre as the acting and directing. Much of the scenic splendour was encouraged by the colonists whose comfort with grandeur bore a direct impact on the theatre. Influential through their attendance and support, the comments from an audience "used to witnessing the best in plays" could be relied upon for the most part as an accurate gauge of the success of a Casino play. In the final analysis, while running their theatre, the colonists had managed to be both professional and adventurous without engaging in cold business tactics which otherwise might characterize their private affairs.

All the while the Casino Theatre was flourishing, many of its patrons had earned rather sullied reputations for themselves through other pastimes. Their balls and parties had grown more lavish through the years. Although their "conspicuous consumption," drew heavy criticism from the general public, the "excesses continued through the early pan of the century, until the disruptions and fall-out from World War I put a serious crimp on lifestyles of such a **grand** scale."¹³ Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, however, the wealthy faithfully attended the theatre which was not as costly or damning as some of their other pastimes. In fact, it had become a sign of prestige to be associated with the Casino Theatre. A certain respectability was attached to being connected with an institution that brought credit and high-standing to the Newport community.

It might be said that the people who had created the life of the Casino Theatre sustained it through many years and at some level abandoned it. Many factors responsible,

other than the aforementioned, are still difficult to pinpoint. For one, the inheritance tax that visited second and third generations devoured so much of their funds that for many the situation became insurmountable. Consequently, it was no longer worthwhile for them to remain in Newport. When many sold their property and moved elsewhere, their departure dealt a serious blow to the Casino's independence.

Yet, until around 1938 the Casino was still the very hub of Newport social life. The morning ritual of women gathering to hear Mullaly's string orchestra while the gentlemen "slipped upstairs for a drink and a friendly game of cards" prevailed. Even the annual invitation tennis tournament was still the peak of the Newport season.¹¹⁴ However, the Newport Casino was still more than the music and tennis scenes. For eight summers the Casino Theatre had transfigured the Newport evenings. Strictly a social affair, opening nights in particular were festive occasions. That evening back in 1927, when the Casino building opened for the first time as a summer theatre, a tradition was set into motion that would leave an indelible impression on the small city. For the nearly two decades following the outbreak of World War I, the Newport Casino Theatre had cut its own swath in the cultural conventions of Newport.

It is unfortunate that not long after the theatre project had been initiated, the stock market failed. Repercussions from this hampered the efforts of the theatre management. Attendance slowly started to decline, and eventually operation of the theatre became impossible to continue on the large scale that its managers had been accustomed to.¹¹⁵ The Theatre festival, with its reputation for substance as well as style had brought the Casino Theatre to a high point of artistic excellence but also managed to exhaust its pecuniary resources. The vortex of spending had drained the Casino of any surplus.

Nevertheless, by 1939, the Newport Casino was among the six summer-circuit theatres active in the United States with six plays scheduled for the season. By then, the Newport Casino Company, a resident company of ten players, formed the support for the guest stars. Despite its financial struggles, the theatre managed to sponsor the American premiere of the London hit *Gaslight* with George Coulouris and A. E. Mathews heading the cast. Newport was the only tryout before the play's early New York opening in September. What came later for the Casino Theatre, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three, is the Hollywood "star" system brought about by the influence of film.

As early as the middle 1930s, however, the arrangement at the theatre was altered. Some of the Casino Players whose last season in Newport had been in 1934, were in film by 1935.¹¹⁶ The situation of money-minded talent moving into the area of film had a bitter effect on stock companies, in general. The appeal of Hollywood was a powerful draw since, through film, actors could receive higher salaries and attain a greater visibility. But in its formative years as a regular theatre, a full season of summer plays had existed within the excellent facilities furnished by the Casino. The erstwhile group who had begun their playhouse with the aspirations of bringing artists of the highest level to the first setting of its kind in America was, for the most part, the same generation who could recall stage figures such as Joseph Jefferson III, James J. O'Neill, Ada Rehan, E.H. Sothem and Julia Marlowe, all who had appeared earlier in Newport. A new contingent of actors made their way to Newport during the post-World War I era, and continue the revered tradition, when the Casino recommitted efforts to bring prominent people of the stage once again who would add to the popularity of the complex while, at the same time, satisfying the expensive, aesthetic inclinations of its supporters.

Emblematic of the golden age of theatre in Newport, the Casino embodied what could be referred to as the blithe spirit of the period. Through the stockholders' financial might, the once high-flying theatrical enterprise had staved for a decade the threat of that which would diminish its authority or detract from its good name. The great age of America's wealth following the Civil War and enduring beyond World War I was palpable in Newport's very visible entourage, which significantly contributed to the colorful past of the Casino.

During its early lifetime, the Casino theatre legitimized the theatrical and artistic expressions of the wealthy class, raising their pastimes from an amateur status to the level of association with the professional. The importance of connecting with artists who were linked with the epitome of Broadway's successes bolstered the wealthy's ascendancy in the arena of social competition. As one of the social spaces of the time, the Casino reflects a revelers' paradise where fortune combined with the pleasure principle. Safeguarded by wealth, the theatre matched other well regarded places of entertainment not only in Newport but throughout coastal resorts of New England. Each summer, as society gathered to revel in the attractions of the premier resort of the East, the Newport summer colony with its penchant for intemperate spending promoted the reputation of the Casino theatre.

Not only did the group contribute a worthy share towards the upkeep and direction of Bennett's new Casino, but it was chiefly important in the development of the theatre's resources. Since the period of these eight years of the Casino Theatre festival, Newport has never equaled its prestige nor its theatrical excellence. A jewel amidst the Casino complex creation, the theatre became the quintessential elite place claimed and exalted by the cottage colony. As a class, they encapsulated the cult of self-expression that furthered their

reputation as epicures of the leisure-class which brought a social and cultural dimension to Newport.

It may be imagined that the Casino was envisioned as the summer colonists' own National Theatre since it represented the spirit that undergirded their everyday lives and values. Through their subsidy and authority, the colonists had engineered a model that shaped a social convention at Newport. While patronizing Bennett's foundation, they created an aura of exclusivity around the Casino, one that set an image of partiality and clannishness. Even though, at times, they made it available to the public, it seemed to be out of reach of the ordinary citizen. Although as a group, the colonists furthered Bennett's creation, the plays raised also their own spirits. For many, isolated in their marital circumstances, the theatre played profitably in their lives since it aided their need for importance and acceptance. The theatre brought them to another level, one of imagination and a projected state of well-being.

Sometimes the mistaken notion circulates that money protects and that the wealthy are devoid of feeling for those less fortunate than themselves. On one level this might be true, as some must have been desensitized by circumstances that dulled their impressionabilities on a daily basis. As a human experience, however, the theatre, if only for a time, has the capacity to deepen one's own living drama. The darkened auditorium fosters anonymity while, at the same time, allowing one to feel a part of a shared perception. Its power to heighten consciousness and stimulate the senses enables many to experience life on a deeper level. One's individualism as an audience member is often given up in exchange for being reconfirmed as a participant in life. At Newport, the Casino Theatre validated the innermost choices of the wealthy who were in a position to live deeply and

draw on the varied impressions of life that theatre has to offer.

The years between 1927 and 1934 represent not only the high-water mark of the Casino Theatre's genius but also it created for the wealthy an atmosphere of transcendence. **Mythmakers** of their own time period, whose portrayal of an ideal world of fashion and power holds world attention to this day, the colony aptly claimed the aesthetic sanctum that the theatre provided.

By comparison, if Colonial Newport enjoyed a golden era which spanned roughly fifty-five years (1720-1775), with its eighteenth-century quaintness, architectural richness and mercantile successes, the period between 1927 and 1934 marks the most dynamic age of Newport's theatrical life. The Casino Theatre Festival, initiated by Moses Taylor, established the Casino as Newport's leading home for drama. Through the machinations of the colonists at the Casino, Newport was now joined to New York not only through the yachting world and through its summer cottages but also through the professional world of the stage.

During these formative and vibrant years, a wide variety of talent, originality, determination and dreams all combined to ignite a response from Newport's high-class citizens. Both the Casino Theatre and its first audience can be seen as the embodiment of a particular period in American life, one which would aggrandize Newport society's exclusive social power and status. Those who were blessed with name, position and wealth, as a class, stood apart from the people and culture of Newport. **As** a dynamic, driving force behind Bennett's **improvisation**, the colony, while characteristically upholding the verisimilitude of

the period, which expressed itself through luxury and privilege, had by the middle 1930s contributed to the greatest theatrical era in Newport history.

CHAPTER THREE

THE FEMININE ERA 1935-/960

During a twenty-five year period between 1934 and 1960, the Casino Theatre had a series of successes predominantly led by women. It is noteworthy that all had made a name for themselves prior to arriving at the Casino. Recognized for their successful leadership roles in the professional theatre, these women had demonstrated competence in a variety of theatrical areas including theatre management, direction and design. Helen Arthur applied her business acumen gained from eight years in the theatrical office of the Shuberts to manage the Neighborhood Playhouse from its opening in 1915 to its closing in 1927.¹ Her associate, Agnes Morgan, who had written and directed the *The Grand Street Follies*, satirical revues that appeared at the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York each spring, directed extensively at the Playhouse under Arthur. Emilene C. Roche, associate of designer Norman Bel Geddes for four years, had organized the Lake Placid Summer Theatre. Marie L. Elkins had acted at Bass Rocks, produced *Michael Steps In* in New York, and managed the Ridgeway Theatre in White Plains, N.Y. Nancy Rogers, for twelve years had worked closely with Winthrop Ames when he produced both in New York and London. And Eleanor Farrington was a rare combination of artist and executive who had designed, painted and constructed settings for several New York plays and was known for her award-winning interior designs.² Finally, Sara Stamm influenced the life of the Casino Theatre for an extended number of years (seventeen) where she applied her experience obtained from

many years in the New York theatre.

The Casino owners recognized the abilities of these women as individuals not so much in need of making a name for themselves, as being able to bring a high level of management and direction to the Casino Theatre. Over the years, as one woman left the Casino, another, exhibiting equal confidence and capabilities, replaced her; each successful in her own realm. Overall, the women combined their talents to produce outstanding theatre in Newport for twenty-five years.

Since 1880, the Casino had been an institution symbolic of the great inherited wealth in Newport whose theatre of cultural distinction was one of the choice destinations for after-sunset pleasures. It was a preferred scene for those who wanted to be seen among the highly cultivated. However, as the hard times of the 1930s altered the circumstances for people of means in Newport, financial difficulties were becoming apparent at the Casino. The theatre management was facing its own challenges. The theatre was not expected to open during the summer of 1935 because Edith Taylor (now Mrs. G. J. Guthrie Nicholson) had stepped down as president and active head of the theatre company during the previous fall. When Taylor left, the acting company disbanded which suggests the universal influence that her ideas and wealth had over the theatre project. Taylor's resignation was met with great disappointment by some within the colony who charged her with having discontinued the Casino Festival as quickly as her late husband had started it. Taylor's decision to abandon her pet project demonstrates a situation where an individual could afford to withdraw her patronage whenever she pleased. Her whims- were seen as the rule.³ She serves as an example of the autonomy enjoyed by some in Newport wherein money was power. What was happening at the Casino underscores the impact of affluence. The

overreaching authority that accompanies wealth was clearly being demonstrated at the theatre. Despite the agitation over Taylor's resignation, however, the situation appears more complicated.

At Taylor's departure, the summer colonists were concerned about the future of the theatre and what might become of it. With their spokeswoman gone and no one individual emerging to take her place, however, the Casino governors were unwilling to take further risks. In the meantime, they were hoping that a New York group would take over their theatre. The Casino governors had already approached several major New York producers, and found that they "were not interested" in any prospects at the time because of their own irregular financial circumstances.⁴ In the absence of a pennant acting company, one proposal was to have new plays produced for the first time at the Casino as the Opera House had done years earlier. Under this plan a play's reception at the Casino would determine whether it would be produced subsequently in New York. Another suggestion was to stage a series of special performances of the Will Rogers, Cornelia Otis Skinner types, but to open the theatre for this kind of entertainment alone was deemed impractical. At one point, the Casino governors even voted to demolish the theatre with the objective of using the land for additional tennis courts.⁵ Amidst the disquietude, growing resentment among some society people over the disbanding of the Theatre Company and the fact that an outside group was being sought festered beneath the veneer of apparent good relations. A much smaller group of colonists who still resided in Newport and remained affluent were determined to stay involved in their theatre's future.

Another factor in the downward circumstances of the Casino was that the era of the 1920s and 1930s was witnessing a preeminence of "chic," especially regarding music. It was

a period where modern jazz was becoming popular and Mozart, among other classical standards, often was played in a jazz style. It became "the thing" to bring in jazz cadenzas, and in other places, to embellish an otherwise classical piece. The Casino's answer to the times was to sponsor "pop" concerts at the theatre which appealed to the younger colonists and drew them in large numbers. Since the cultural picture of Newport was beginning to assume a heterogeneous shape as certain aspects of popular culture filtered into the Newport scene, the Casino anticipated a variety of adjustments necessary to meet these changes. The Casino world, which had been created for the rich and sustained by them, was being shaken by outside influences beyond their control. The 'gestalt' of *beau monde* Newport, which had been that of an ultra-exclusive club, was now being challenged by a mix of professionals from diverse economic backgrounds. With the inauguration of a "pop" concert, the question soon arose as to whether music was eclipsing theatre at the Casino. But so far, fortune was still on the side of the spoken word. At the same time, it was apparent that the jet-setting generation was beginning to disrupt the mold.

In 1935, the theatre did reopen under the auspices of Actor Managers, Inc., a professional group based in New York. If other groups showed an interest prior to the hiring of Actors Managers, none was judged to be suitable. At least no other group was permitted to take over the theatre. Still guarded with respect to whom they would allow to operate their theatre, the Casino stockholders rented their facility to individuals already recognized in the theatre world. An operation with New York cachet seemed the right choice in the minds of these men who were originally from New York and seemed to be looking toward "home" for the recovery of their theatre. Helen Arthur, the executive director of the Actor Managers in New York, became the executive director of Actor Managers in Newport.⁶ As

former director and business manager of the Neighborhood Playhouse, Arthur's experience spoke for her capabilities. More than likely, behind the decision to lease to Arthur was the Casino officers' hope that hers might be the group to carry on the tradition which many of their friends and ancestors had started with pride and purpose. They felt that the acting organization could be relied upon even though the increasingly desperate economic situation of the 1930s gave evidence of how unsettled the theatre was at the time.

The theatre world was not alone in struggling to survive in an unstable setting. The economy and the social structure of all America was being challenged. The Casino was feeling the calamities visiting an era which at this point was in jeopardy. Actor Managers might be able to infuse new life into the playhouse, but would be at a loss to recapture the splendor of its past existence. The fact that the company had no reserve funds compounded its problems and made the situation tenuous. In some respects, Actor Managers' predicament was an additional injury that continued to punctuate the economic ruin of the wealthy.

Prior to the new company's arrival, the Casino Theatre had been a personalized token of the Newport *haute monde*, and was an extension of that group's preference for a type of elite entertainment. While the Casino grounds, with their manicured lawns, possessed an atmosphere of pleasing repose for its members, the theatre had been a place of excitement and appeal. Although the prevailing attitude was one of appreciation for the fact that their theatre was still in operation, some colonists took umbrage over the fact that a group, whose financial status was in question, was making decisions about the institution which had always been under their definitive control. Compounding the problem was the fact that these wealthy individuals, who at one time were the exclusive rulers of this domain, were at

a loss as to how to remedy the situation.

Since its inception, the Casino tradition was generally perceived as rich and tasteful. The fact that the theatre was revealing signs of diminished resources in the past few years apparently did not deter Actor Managers from undertaking a venture that would have given pause to a company with less confidence. With their publicity channels in place, the group assumed the theatrical responsibilities and continued the plays with little interruption. The *Newport Daily News* records that Helen Arthur, after investigating summer venues throughout the country, was convinced that "Newport [was] one of the best places for a summer theatre.,⁷ At the same time, she was not operating from a naive standpoint, but was fully aware that the theatre had been losing support gradually, with fewer patrons each year. Her opinion regarding the Casino Theatre as expressed in the *Newport Mercury*, was that it was the "best equipped of any of the summer playhouses," and she had no doubt "that it rank[ed] with leading New York houses."s Although Arthur's fervor matched her expectations, it would be an uphill struggle to keep alive the Casino's good reputation.

The new leader and her group took every advantage to make the Casino a community theatre which was a departure from its past practices. Arthur seized the opportunity to address the audiences at the "pop" concerts about her plans. Her desire was to sustain a theatre where a body of outstanding plays could continue to be presented by a group of exceptionally gifted people. She consistently spoke to audiences before the rise of the curtain and between the acts about her ideas. Her aim was "to secure the cooperation of the townspeople, summer residents, the naval colony and residents in near-by cities to make the theatre a pennant institution.,⁹ For all her efforts, Arthur was never really successful in making the Casino a community theatre. Ironically, the one group utterly supportive of

her efforts, either through gala openings of scheduled plays or by purchasing subscription tickets, was the summer colony. Despite the disorder of their own financial accounts, many viewed their connections to the theatre as a necessity since it was a reminder of their more prosperous days.

Actor Managers took pre-emptive measures to make the theatre stand out even though their own economic future was uncertain. The company held rehearsals in Newport while conducting its one month of plays during August. Since 1935 was to be a short season, it was not worth their while to travel between the two cities. Even under the earlier management of Taylor and Vanderbilt rehearsals were held in Newport beginning in 1933. It was, therefore, recognized two years prior to the 1935 season that this would eliminate the need to rent two facilities, one in New York and another in Newport. Prior to 1933, however, New York had been the rehearsal site with the cast arriving in Newport a day or two before a scheduled production. Although the Depression had spelled the end for large orchestras, an added feature brought in by Actor Managers for the Newport playhouse was Alexander Haas' Hungarian Gypsy Orchestra which offered special programs before and between the acts.

With a belated ninth season, beginning in 1935, only four plays were scheduled for August. The new lessee, the Actor Managers group, opened with *Peg O' My Heart* star Laurette Taylor appearing in her own comedy, *At Marion's*, which she had produced in Maine a season earlier and rewrote for the Newport presentation. This was Actors Managers' opportunity to bring an altogether new look to the theatre since none of Taylor's supporting cast had previously been at the Casino. Brahman Margaret Anglin appeared as the impoverished but resourceful Lady Mary Crabbe in *Fresh Fields*. The Ivor Novello

farce had long runs in London and Chicago. When presented in New York the following October, Anglin was cast in the same role she held at the Casino, an indication of the confidence the New York producers had in her abilities. Edith Barrett who "bore out the family tradition of capable acting over several generations" and was herself an established star, acted next in a Keith Winter **drama**, *The Shining Hour*. In the fourth and final play of the season, some turmoil resulted over the need for a replacement of the female lead. In *Behind the Verdict*, a new play, Muriel Starr replaced Laurette Taylor as the lead because Taylor and the company were unable to agree on her interpretation of the role.

For this final play of 1935, Emeline Clark Roche designed four sets for four acts. The scenery included two new stage floor boxes, one at each side of the auditorium. These became part of the action, and members of the audience were used as the jury during a trial scene. *Behind the Verdict* had an unusually large cast" with many of the actors imported from New York." Supporting actors whom the audience particularly liked were Whitner Bissell, Ernest Woodward and Elizabeth Dean Farrar. Geraldine Corson of **Newport** had a small role that she "handled to satisfaction," with smaller parts given to other Newporters.

During its first season, Actor Managers inaugurated a contest in which the audience voted (through a ballot box) for the actor of their choice for the season. This first contest resulted in two favorites being chosen. They were Margaret Anglin and Muriel Starr: Anglin for her respected acting background which carried over to the Casino productions, and Starr for replacing Taylor on short notice. The guest stars in 1935 were all **women**, but that changed in 1936.

The course of Actor Managers first season was far from smooth. According to the *Newport Daily News*, the choice of the first play was **ttunfortunate** due partly to the

temperament of the actress," but the next two plays and their leading women were well received. Stage veteran Anglin was followed by Edith Barrett, long a favorite in Newport. The opening for the fourth play was delayed two days because of a difference over interpretation of the principal part, the nature of which was undisclosed to the public, that made it necessary for a new player to be obtained. *Behind the Verdict* was rescheduled from Tuesday to Thursday evening in order to give Starr additional time to master her role. Nonetheless, the colony and Newport's general audience supported the delays and were anxious to make the short season a memorable one. Accordingly, the one-time inheritors of great wealth had to contend with 1935 being the shortest season in the theatre's history.

Despite the financial strains experienced during the 1930s, the years of professional experience that Actor Managers had in New York were reflected in the stage settings and overall impressions at Newport. In leasing the theatre, the company demonstrated its competence. Its background was made manifest through its choices of plays, and the singular strength of the leading actors and an able company was in evidence during that first season. The new acting troupe became involved with the greater Newport community during the following year when it participated in Newport's tercentenary by sponsoring a gala opening of Sheridan's *The Critic*, the subject of which appealed to many in the Newport community for the literary burlesque in many of its comic scenes.

From the outset, Actor Managers had included a number of women in its official positions. Clara Weiss as business manager and Agnes Morgan, the company's stage director, were both connected with Actor Managers. Morgan, staged all the 1935 Casino plays. The overall success of the company's four-week venture resulted in its return in 1936. The Casino season went from a four-week season in 1935 to an eight-week in 1936, proof

of the company's ability to exist during an economically troubled period. The company arranged for both plays and players and made plans to have eight different stars featured, one for each production. Well-known New York designer and painter, Charles Stepenach, who was Cleon Throckmorton's main assistant for several years, joined the Casino's design department. Although engaged in the financial struggle of their life, the company managed to employ a designer whose reputation and skill would help their image.

The intention of the new management was to sell sufficient tickets in order to increase the income with the hope that many of the new patrons would become season ticket holders. Subscribers had a choice location in the theatre which enabled them to save part of the cost for the season, provided they purchased tickets early. If the early subscribers did not come forward, their seats were released to others applying. Actor Managers strived to establish the "playhouse as a real community theatre" and were convinced that a way to develop their plan was "to make it a popular priced house." As the local newspapers advertised, to bring the summer theatre within the reach of more people, "the theatre company reduced the admission prices, scaling them even lower than the former years under the colony."¹¹ However, even with the price cuts, according to the dollar standard of the day, the costs were considered high and not affordable to many. The range of prices was identical Tuesday through Saturday. Subscription seats for orchestra ranged from eight to sixteen dollars for individual tickets. The price of a box seat for the season was two hundred dollars, tax included.¹² The average Newporter could not afford the cost of single season tickets. The locals continued to patronize less expensive places of amusement, such as the movie houses in and around Newport and the large halls, that provided a variety of inexpensive entertainment.¹³ The alternate choices available were commensurate with the

economic means of the majority and continued to suit their interests. Overall, the Casino had to rely on fewer and fewer Newport colonists to bear the burden of financial support.

In addition to the previous season's favorites, Elizabeth Dean Farrar and Charles Trexler, the regulars in the pennant resident company during 1936 included Doris Dalton, Edgar Kent, Elizabeth Cerf, Minna Phillips, Stephen Ker Appleby, Hayden Rorke, Philip Tonge and Shirley Osborn. The first choice, *When Ladies Meet*, Rachel Crothers's sophisticated farce, entertained while it encouraged the audience to think, qualities that often make the work of a playwright popular. The play demonstrated the "many advantages offered by the Casino Theatre." Its facilities offered designers a broader scope making it easier, for example, to generate "a realistic thunderstorm in Act II." Subsequently, the theatre facilitated such creations as the reinvention of ballrooms, European waterfronts, and period homes reminiscent of past centuries which played out well in a theatre dominated by style.

Arthur and Actor Managers made sound professional choices in acquiring the right actors to play leading roles. Minna Phillips brought a certain refinement and intelligence to the success of the mystery melodrama, *Kind Lady*. Austro-Bavarian actor, Tonio Selwart played in *The Pursuit of Happiness* with the same role he had created on Broadway, the first of his appearances in the United States. As leading man in the state theatre in Munich, Selwart's repertoire included Shakespeare, Schiller, Shaw and Ibsen.¹⁴ Emeline Rochels sets were praised, both for the "homey design of a colonial home in *Pursuit* and her effective interior of a mansion living room duplicated to every detail" of a London apartment in *Kind Lady*.

Berkeley Square, a poignant romance, dramatized by John L. Balderton on a plot

suggested by a posthumous fragment of Henry James, brought Alexander Kirkland to the Casino. The play, a Revolutionary War love story that bridged the gap between 1784 and 1928, "staged by an able cast, and costumed in a manner that found no fault" was a production that called for a skillful delivery or otherwise the plot would have been lost. Kirkland brought to the role of Peter Standish "a seeming naturalness that all actors strive for, but only a few attain."¹⁵ The performance, as well as those by supporting members of the company in the well-filled summer playhouse, served to demonstrate the composite of talent possessed by director, actors and designers. Tribute was paid to scenic designer Roche's room of a house of the Queen Anne period in Berkely Square, London, where the action takes place. Overall, the plays depended on the leads for the smooth execution of some rather complex portrayals. The regulars shone as well. Doris Dalton was one whose "natural chann" and experience, some of which could be attributed to her work with leading New York actors, brought an additional grace to the Casino.

One of the plays, *Brief Candle*, produced in this 1936 season dealt with the situation facing the Newport of the 1930s, giving the city a taste of its own reality. Robert Hare Powell's play was symbolic of the fading order of the old in Newport.¹⁶ A romantic comedy of old and new Newport, the play typifies the situation of traditions being replaced by pervasive new ideas. The play, "about Newport, by a Newporter, enacted for Newport" was for that reason "particularly interesting to Newporters." The piece was popular not only in Newport but "had been one of the popular choices for summer theatres all over the country.,¹⁷ A capacity Casino house rewarded the acting company for its selection. Roche's setting of an old Newport home was evocative of a fantastic evening which could fit the description of days gone by.

The play itself represents the old order slipping into the control of the younger generation, a parallel that could be seen in then contemporary Newport. The Depression had been slowly strangling Newport's mystique as a summer resort. The "Gilded" time was no longer in full glory. Those among the older generation who were still in Newport tried to maintain the memory of the past, but simply could not withstand the influx of change. "High taxes resulted in the closing of many large houses," and the recreational preferences of the younger colonists' generation were changing.¹⁸

Powell's talk to the Rotary Club on the future of Newport seems prophetic. The author questioned the future of the large summer residences, and how much longer they could survive "on such a grand scale" since the younger generation was losing interest in remaining "in such large houses" during an entire summer.¹⁹ By this time, other resorts were attracting these young people who had experienced Newport for several years and were looking for a change. The fact that they were taking their interests and money elsewhere had dealt a crippling blow to the type of financial support that the Casino had come to rely on. To begin with, many no longer had the same type of money as their fathers who had had no income tax to worry about. Rather than being a haven for enjoyment, the estates were becoming a burden to the inheritors. Unable to afford the inheritance tax, one generation could be in a position to lose a substantial amount of property. For many, it was no longer possible to remain in Newport. Consequently, the young children of old money were retreating to other resorts. The old vanguard was fading and giving rise to the new, the results of which had infelicitous effects on the Casino's ability to meet the costs of superior entertainment which it was determined to keep.

In the midst of these extreme changes affecting the Casino patrons, Actor Managers

went about its theatre business and through *Personal Appearance* brought four New York actors who had previously won distinction in the play: Barbara Brown, Hayden Rorke, Suzanne Jackson and Minna Phillips. Subtitled *How Far [s the Barn?*, Lawrence Riley's comedy burlesqued the life of a film actress on a tour of small-town theatres. The play had success on Broadway, on the road, and wherever it played due in some measure to Brown's own interpretation.

To some degree, Actor Managers' participation in the community events was successful. They had produced *Brief Candle*, one of the popular choices for summer theatres, and anticipated the city's tercentenary (1639) three years in advance of the actual anniversary of its founding. Helen Arthur frequently reminded the Newport audience that Actor Managers "had gone to great trouble and expense to bring" some of the best plays to Newport and put them on "in a manner that would be acceptable on Broadway." Regardless of Arthur's lectures, however, it appears that many Newporters believed that the Casino and its playhouse were for the ultra-wealthy and sophisticated. Despite Arthur's reproofs to the locals regarding what she interpreted as a lack of responsibility, Newporters still associated the Casino, including its theatre, with Bennett and his coterie. It was no secret that on occasion the Casino benefactors had demonstrated an elitism that offended even some of the Casino actors. In the last analysis, despite favorable reviews and seasoned theatregoers' delight with the manner in which the productions were staged, it was not sufficient. Frustrated with the situation, Arthur accused the locals of "failing to cooperate wholeheartedly in spite of the favorable low price scale inaugurated..."²⁰ The reality was that Newport had been the playground of the wealthy, and its history was rich with the type of money which now was being lost or squandered. The Casino Theatre's future was being

hampered directly by the ruinous circumstances of the moneyed people who were no longer in a position to spend liberally without the backlash of consequences.

Regardless of rejection by the Casino's high society, Actor Managers made every attempt to assimilate itself into the Casino culture. The company joined efforts with the Newport tercentenary committee in 1936 and offered as its final bill a gala production of *The Critic*. The performance was eighteenth century all the way from the costumed doorman and ushers with their powdered wigs and luxurious dress, to the Congdon Trio which provided the music. The choice was a change from the usual light fare. Sheridan's illustration of the faults of the theatre of the period around 1779 is stinging, yet good entertainment. The production brought in new faces. Charles Trexler gave a warning in the prologue to contemporary critics whom he mentions by name. By using local members of the cast, Actor Managers added a Newport flavor to the commemorative offering. Roche "designed some fine sets" and Emery Herrett's costumes were "well-nigh perfect reproductions" of those from the age of Sheridan. Charles Stepanek painted the scenery and according to the newspapers "his Drury Lane curtain [was] worth seeing."²¹ Sheridan's play, with its eighteenth-century biting satire, contributed to the nostalgia at the Casino, and Agnes Morgan received kudos for her direction. Even with its triumphs, by the end of the 1936 season, Actor Managers had its financial limitations brought under public scrutiny. Although its members had professional training and were responsible for some bright moments at the Casino, the company had relatively little money which eventually contributed to its downfall.

Many of the problems accentuated in later decades stemmed from the 1930s. It is difficult to pinpoint what happened precisely since the institution operated under such tight

guard. What is known, however, is that the theatre's untimely start in 1927 was unfortunate since two years later the failure of the stock market eliminated many such theatres. Arthur, who was aware of the disappointingly inadequate support given performances at the theatre during 1934, attempted to maintain the standards of the playhouse by garnering actors such as Margaret Anglin, Edith Barrett, Whitford Kane, and others who were respected names in the American theatre. However, regardless of her efforts, the plan did not work. The situation at the Casino became too severe for anyone either within or without the circle of privilege to be able to retrieve the losses. All the same, Arthur tempted fate and strove to keep the theatre alive as a place of exceptional entertainment.

To rejuvenate interest in the new 1937 season, Actor Managers's repertory included five new plays: two English, one French and two domestic. The first bill, *Sweet Sorrow*, a world premiere by Eric Swift was a romantic comedy with Doris Dalton and Leslie Barrie in the leads.²¹ It played "to a filled house of summer colonists and townspeople." *Retreat From Folly*, then a London success with Marie Tempest, was jointly written by Amy Kennedy Gould and Eileen Russell, formerly associated with the London office of R.K.O. Guest star Margaret Anglin (1935) was featured with Stiano Braggiotti, who had played in several productions the summer before (1936). *The Secret Heart*, Yvan Noe's new romantic comedy from the French, featured Guy de Vestel, distinguished actor-director of the French theatre of New York.²³ The play's adaptation for the American stage was by Blythe Parsons and Agnes Morgan, who also directed it for the Newport production. Guy de Vestal took the lead, while Beatrice Terry and Doris Dalton had featured roles. A Newporter, Valentine Vernon, made her debut with Actor Managers in the play. John Tuerk, a New York producer, was in the audience to look over the local presentation of the play by an

American cast.

Aside from the several new offerings in the repertory, the 1937 season paralleled the previous two. Admission prices were still held at the "lower scale." All the seats except the boxes were orchestra. The floor was divided into three groups which graduated from the less expensive season tickets at the back of the house to the slightly higher in the front. At the time, many of the larger houses had an advantage in that they drew on a larger revenue. Although the Casino Theatre was attractive, it was not large. The *Newport Mercury* reported that, for the first half of the Casino's summer bill, there were complaints that the audience was not large enough and those sponsoring the plays were discouraged.²⁴

In the following season, 1937, Actor Managers showed a different approach when they substituted premiere performances with a revival of a popular 1930s comedy, probably since little risk would be involved. There was little danger in producing Paul Osborne's sophisticated farce, *The Vinegar Tree*, with Leona Powers who had been giving stellar performances. Powers had played the role of the erratic wife several times before in Washington, St. Louis and other cities, although it was originated by Mary Boland. Visitors in Newport for the annual yacht races "were everywhere in evidence." Valentine Vernon was a hit in a challenging role, as the emotional daughter of the irrepressible Laura (Powers) and the sour Augustus played by Edgar Kent. Perhaps due to Powers and Kent's accomplished performances, C. L. Anthony's romantic comedy, *Autumn Crocus*, set an attendance record for the 1937 season, as patrons of the summer theatre "turned out en masse despite the heat wave." Tonia Selwart played the central role of the innkeeper, and seemed especially well-suited to the part. Alongside Selwart was Doris Dalton in her farewell appearance of the season before going into rehearsal for *Blow Ye Winds* with Henry

Fonda in New York. Designer Roche created breathtaking sets which were appreciated. "With Venus, the morning star, hanging low in the sky, the setting of the mountain side used in the second scene of act II and the Austrian Inn of acts I and III" drew generous applause from the spectators.²⁵ These fine results demonstrate that Actor Managers was struggling to keep alive the tradition of the Casino as a designers' theatre.

The first of the new American plays, *The Inconstant Moon*, brought its author, Willa Frederic, to Newport for the opening. The play, with little to recommend it, had been staged once before but rewritten for its Newport performance. Had it not been for the life injected into the leads by Dorothy Sands and Paul McGrath in particular "and by others in the company to a slighter degree" it "would have fallen flat." Roche's set overlooking the bay of Naples received the usual press paeans as they continued to please the Newport audiences.

The audience sensed a new peak in the 1937 season with *As Husbands Go* with Cecilia Loftus and Edith Barren. Loftus who alternated between touring and the stage "imparted a naturalness to her role that could almost be felt by those across the footlights, as the audience perceived that what was before them was something out of the ordinary.,²⁶ Barrett's return to Newport "was an event in itself." Charles Stepanek's sets matched the stars' aptitudes. The final production of the season was the premiere of Abby Merchant's *The Dramatist*.²⁷ The allegorical comedy in verse included a ballet by the Hanya Holm Group and incidental music provided by organist, Hans Hanke. Merchant describes her romantic drama as "a character study in verse, modern in tone and technique." In spite of the contemporary set, the names of Pierrot, Columbine, Harlequin, Scarnel and Isobel evoke a classical period. Although the general criticism was that the play was a bit heavy for

the final offering of summer entertainment, people appreciated the efforts of Alexander Kirkland who appeared in the difficult title role after only one week of rehearsal. Miriam Jordan's Isobel gave the "illusion of coolness and logic," two identifiable attributes for which the wealthy sophisticates clamored.²⁸ Agnes Morgan's staging earned the usual encomiums while Roche's sets continued to please. As the season's finale, Fray and Braggioni, a piano team, gave a benefit performance arranged for Actor Managers. The program was a range of popular selections from Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* to compositions by Rachmaninoff and Strauss. An offering of another type, Helen Howe in her six different skits "Character and Caricatures" completed the evening's entertainment. The need for such a benefit suggests that the new management was on a collision course with reality.

In 1938, the fourth season began with a revival of Anna Cora Mowatt's *Fashion*, which had been a great success in the original 1845 production, and opened to a capacity Casino house in 1938. The five-act "improving moral comedy" was directed by Morgan with settings by Roche. Dorothy Sands played Gertrude, the country girl turned heiress. Sands gave a "well-applauded performance" in songs between the acts as well as in the play. Songs and instrumental music of the period were arranged by Lily May Hyland and played by the F. Hazen Car Trio. Before the curtain went up, Helen Arthur briefly described the background of the production, comparing the mid-nineteenth-century stage with that of the present day. The vast changes that had taken place could be noted at the Casino. Six members of the Newport Players Guild, a community acting group whose growing popularity gave promise "of its becoming an integral...part of the community," appeared in the ballroom scene.²⁹ Even though the play was dated, the playgoers of 1938 seemed to

appreciate the playful warning of Mowatt's witty satire of pretentious Americans who ineptly mimicked English manners.

That Sidney Howard's comedy *The Late Christopher Bean* had lost none of its appeal was clear on opening night in spite of four previous Newport productions. Actor Managers contracted Pauline Lord, for whom the part was originally written, to play Abby. Although Mary Michaels had played Abby at the Casino in 1933, and Marie Dressler's film version was familiar to many Newporters, the audience seemed to sense that it was seeing an unusual performance, as Lord returned to the Stanford White Theatre where she had last performed in *Candida* in 1927. The premiere of Agnes Morgan's new mystery play *Grandpa* played with Mabel Taliaferro, Robert Perry, Alan Hewitt and "doing applauded work as the main members of the cast." Even though the premiere indicated where the play needed to be cut, and while a very different type from the company's usual productions, it made as much of an appeal as one of Noel Coward's had a week earlier.

Glasgow-born Cecilia Loftus, daughter of popular music hall entertainers, returned to display her versatility as an actor with a Sunday evening performance entitled *Impersonations and Impressions* of stars from the stage of the past and present. Loftus, who by now had "grown almost a part of the American and British stage as the inimitable Cissy," provided entertainment from the comic to the serious. Her impressions of Pauline Lord in a scene from *The Late Christopher Bean*, which Lord had performed in Newport just two weeks prior, was one of the imitations easiest for her audience to compare with the original. Loftus also lampooned Gertrude Lawrence in *Susan and God*, Beatrice Lillie in *At Home Abroad*, and Lynn Fontanne in *Idiot's Delight*. Those familiar with Mrs. Patrick Campbell were amused by Loftus's impression of Campbell with her dog "Moonbeam" in a

Hollywood studio. Imitations of Sir Harry Lauder and Sophie Tucker were highlights of the evening's entertainment. Ethel Barrymore, Mrs. Fiske, Nora Bayes, Fanny Brice and Ruth Draper also were parodied.

After Loftus' "performance and two encores required by thunderous curtain calls," she added a short sketch which she had written herself.³⁰ The actress may have been viewed at the playhouse as a popular version of the earlier Cornelia Otis Skinner, who had exuded a refinement and sophistication that reflected the tastes of the earlier colony audience. The Newport audiences of the mid-1930s tended to be younger and were exposed to a greater variety of theatrical art forms for which Loftus displayed a distinctive talent. Following Loftus, a French skit and two songs in the style of Yvette Guilbert were given. Also, reminiscences of the old English music halls, including "Waiting at the Church" and "The Wishing Well" as they might have been done by Vesta Victoria and Marie Lloyd's "Cromwell" and "The Days When I Was Young" followed.

Although the Casino Theatre aimed chiefly to entertain, it took every opportunity to sponsor plays of a more lasting quality that stirred ideas and stimulated audience conversation. Giving new playwrights an opportunity to be heard, even if on a hot summer evening, had been a colony tradition that Actor Managers adhered to during its tenure at the Casino. The earlier management saw itself as a catalyst for a type of cultural enrichment that was significantly different from what the local popular facilities like the Colonial and the Strand theatres and the Opera House offered. In essence, the Casino stood out by its creation of an atmosphere that characterized the founding concept. The types of entertainment that appeared on the Casino stage spoke to a sophistication uncharacteristic of the other local theatres. These contributed to the superior attitude that became the reputation

of the Casino members. Actor Managers continued this tradition against all odds.

The Company consistently produced plays of sophistication and hired actors who had been successful commercially. An example is Terence Rattigan's first American success, *French Without Tears*, that starred Elizabeth Love and Auguste Aramini. Annini, who had appeared often with the Comedie Française in Paris, brought a modern Belgian touch to the evening. He "all but stole the show" while Hayden Rorke as the British naval officer "provided the excuse for several thrusts at the service that delighted Newporters...,"³¹ Rattigan's rowdy slapstick coupled with a sophisticated dialogue provided an enjoyable evening. As a final offering, *Cognac*, a new European play, had its American premiere in Newport. A comedy interspersed with serious moments, it was adapted for the Casino stage by Alga Lee and Franz Hoellering. The action of the Frantisek Langer piece unfolded before Roche's setting of a Marseille waterfront. Tonio Selwart, Leo Bulgakov, Doris Rich, Jeanne Casselle and William Bendix were also featured. Again, members of the Newport Players Guild were used, this time for a crowd scene in a cafe garden. The play had been produced in Prague, but the Casino's Tuesday audience was the first to see it in America.

Even though the Casino Theatre continued to relish its elite role, it also needed to fill the seats in its theatre. In order to succeed at this, the 1939 season centered around Broadway choices with nationally known players. Emphasis was on comedy, with five scheduled along with a mystery thriller. The first two plays, *Spring Meeting* and *George and Margaret*, had been well-received both in London and New York. *The White Steed* was the New York Critics Circle's prize play for the 1938-1939 season. *Private Lives*, a typical Coward comedy, had been given in key cities as well as in summer stock. The pre-Broadway showing of *Marriage Royal* followed.³² The season's only mystery, *Gaslight*,

had been produced in London where it was in its twenty-fifth week. Regardless of financial difficulties, the ticket prices at the Casino continued to be kept the same as the year before. There was no change, either, in the number of performances which ran four evenings, Tuesday through Friday with a Thursday matinee.

Gladys Cooper³³ and Philip Merivale,³⁴ considered to be distinguished English stage actors of their day, opened the fifth Casino season in *Spring Meeting*. M. J. Farrell and John Perry's Irish play opened before the largest first-night audience under Actor Managers. Co-producer of the comedy when it appeared in New York the following December, Cooper had played opposite A. E. Matthews before the role was taken over by Merivale. Ethel Morrison and Philip Tonge were also impressive. English writer Gerald Savory's *George and Margaret* featured Doris Dalton and Ethel Morrison.³⁵ They were supported by a cast that included Richard Waring, Wyman Kane, Philip Tonge, Edgar Kent, Esther Mitchell and Perry Wilson. *The White Steed*, credibly sinister in the Europe of 1939, was the last offering. Written by *Shadow and Substance* author Paul Vincent Carroll, it had received the Drama Critics award for the 1938-1939 season. The play brought Ireland's versatile Whitford Kane back to Newport as the old Irish canon, and featured Joanna Roos and Philip Tonge. It even inspired Touro Synagogue Rabbi, Morris Gutstein, to deliver a homily on the separation of church and state.

Private Lives, with its unmistakably characteristic Coward humor, starred Doris Dalton as Amanda and Philip Tonge as Elyot. As it is a play that depends on all four principals to keep the plot moving smoothly, Hathaway Kale as Cybil and Charles Trexler as Victor contributed to the tempestuous mood of the comedy. Seven curtain calls attested to the popularity of Coward at the Casino. It was agreed that, with this performance, Actor-

Managers' players reached a new level of achievement. Philip Tonge was especially impressive as the whimsical and flippant Elyot. It was an unusual role for Tonge who had last played the young dogmatic priest of *The White Steed* and certainly proved the range of the actor's talents. In the pre-Broadway showing of the new comedy *Marriage Royal*, Lucille Watson debuted at Newport which was her first appearance **in** summer stock.³⁶ She was supported by two well-known actors, Herbert Yost and Reginald Mason. The play was expected to undergo some revisions before Watson and author, Robert Walsten, took it to New York. Called a romantic comedy "with an ironic vein," the piece was compared to *The Student Prince* without music (although there was one song, a waltz, sung by Doris Dalton).

Prior to presenting *Gaslight* **in** New York as one of the early September openings, producer John Wildberg brought the new mystery to the Casino Theatre. Author of the popular *Rope*., Patrick Hamilton, offered a thriller that gave Newport's first audience something other than gossip to distract them during intermission. After its great success in London that season., the play was a good choice for any summer theatre. New faces replaced the old for the final offering of the season. Claudia Morgan (daughter of Ralph and niece of Frank Morgan of stage and film reputation), John Emery and A.P. Kaye had the three main parts in the Victorian story of "intrigue and criminal cunning" at the Casino. This was the only play of the season which Agnes Morgan did not direct. Directed by Chester Erskin in advance of its Broadway opening, the theatre was "nearly filled despite the bad weather that prevailed." *Gaslight*, a melodrama, although "of a high quality," was convincing in its acting.

Helen Arthur and company continued to make every effort to transform the Casino into a community affair. Each Wednesday was designated as "Town Night." Special box

and theatre parties were arranged for the opening of the plays. What this meant in reality was that it was still only the leaders of the Newport community who were involved. Members of representative groups were included while the general Newport public was not in attendance. For example, among the box holders were the Newport mayor and members of the 15th division of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Librarians and staff from the Newport Historical Society were also invited. Other theatre parties included the assistant secretary of the Chamber of Commerce and members of the National Brown Junior League as weekly patrons of the theatre.³⁷ While various types of designated groups participated in the life of the Casino, Arthur was still unable to draw a wider range of Newport citizens. It remained cost prohibitive for the average Newporter to purchase a seat. Because of this, the Casino continued to be a forum for individuals who had experienced recognition in the community and were accustomed to preferential treatment. Once again, those who had a higher profile in the city, and not the ordinary Newporter, were more easily able to afford a seat accompanied by a feeling of acceptance which enabled them to take their places among the pillars of the theatrical world.

As an early organizer and administrator of one of the Federal Theatre Project chapters in New York under Elmer Rice during the 1930s, Arthur was accustomed to risks and disappointments. She understood the theatre, at least in the larger city. Repeatedly, Arthur was pressing Newport to decide whether it wanted a theatre. She went to great expense to bring good theatre to the Casino and reminded audiences of her trials on various occasions. Arthur may not have been harsh, but she was perhaps impatient with Newporters. Even if many of the Newport people felt inferior and somewhat uncomfortable at the theatre, it did not diminish their attachment to the milieu associated with their city

which caused them to be proud of the wealthy component of society. Curiously, although not numbered among the preferred clientele and insecure with respect to placement and honor at the Casino, many Newporters found themselves identifying with a class that brought recognition to their city.

Even though Arthur tried to diminish the hierarchy at the theatre, the ones who came forward without hesitation and supported her efforts were still the summer colonists. Tuesday evening continued to belong to them because they were the ones who, for the most part, could afford the higher priced seats. Names such as Auchincloss, Arthur Curtiss James, Maxim Karolik and Gustave J. S. White retained their usual season boxes. The Belknaps, a family whose history stems from McKim, Mead and White time and a respected name in Newport, was another representation of the group still able to maintain status at the Casino.¹⁸ As could be expected in a setting of this nature, many of the members of high society continued to be the major ticket holders even though many must have done so at some level of personal but privately acknowledged sacrifice.

As it turned out, each year between 1935 and 1939, Arthur would propose her choice of plays and plans for the summer theatre to the Casino board of governors which would grant her the necessary approval. At that point, she would try once again to convince the larger Newport audience that a community theatre was what they wanted. Overall, the apathetic response to Arthur's pleas, which prompted her to accuse Newport of "dragging its feet," only made her more determined to achieve her objectives. Arthur's spirited nature may have been interpreted as needling by some Newporters. She never spoke to the Tuesday night audience regarding money since these opening-nighters were the ones whose support made the difference at the theatre. However, she was condescending toward the

Newport public. To many, her approach may have been intimidating. More than likely, she meant well and thought that a stern tone would reinforce the urgency of the situation, but it appeared to have had a negative effect. Her impatience with the Newport audience seemed to alienate them. Arthur was experienced in a managerial capacity, but had operated only in a large city which at times did not serve her well in Newport. Perhaps if she had been more diplomatic and conciliatory, all would have worked to her satisfaction.

Upon completion of its fifth season, it was not clear if Actor Managers would return. Arthur acknowledged that the company's losses in the six-week season had been "fairly heavy," with box office receipts slightly under the previous summer. Arthur and company were hopeful of having another season in Newport in 1940 if another method of financing and underwriting the season could be arranged. However, Arthur's sudden death of a cerebral thrombosis at Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center in New York on 9 December 1939 prevented her from creating a new plan to revive the Casino Theatre.³⁹

While the Casino was under Arthur's **management**, many of the better known actors who appeared at Newport had already toured with these same productions. They had attained some level of esteem in the culture. For the most part, these actors began their careers under the management and direction of respected names. Margaret Anglin, for example, began with Charles Frohman before appearing with other well regarded actors early in her career. Many, as they either neared retirement, or were losing interest in long engagements, did stock in leading summer theatres in America. They learned their acting skills from experienced performers and later influenced budding thespians in stock. Other actors, such as Doris Dalton, were fairly successful **in New York**, but frequently acted on tours to some of the foremost summer theatres in the country.

Following Helen Arthur's death, the Casino hired three women with significant professional experience as the new managers. Marie L. Elkins, Emeline C. Roche, and Nancy Rogers quickly renamed the theatre the Casino Civic, probably to appeal to the social consciousness of Newporters and to make it sound less elitist and more egalitarian. Elkins was hired as producer while Emeline C. Roche, who had been stage designer and technical director for the past five years successively at the Casino, was retained in that position.⁴⁰ Roche's application of European stage methods which she learned while studying and traveling abroad were well received at the Casino. Rogers became the theatre's new business manager.⁴¹ At the time of her Casino appointment, Rogers represented Ruth Draper and was business manager for the New York School of the Theatre.

Functioning as the new managers, the three formed the Casino Civic Theatre Associates. They invited a small group of Newport summer residents to the Hotel Viking for a meeting where the women outlined their plans. The associates shared their idea to make the operation of the theatre "of greater interest locally." In their attempts to form a theatre that would benefit both the management and the audience, the women took suggestions from the invited residents. During 1940, plans were still in the working stages as the season's plays and resident actors were to be announced. Originally, performances were to be Tuesday through Friday evenings and continue with the Thursday matinee at 2:30, but, before opening the theatre for the summer season, the new lessees added a Saturday evening performance. They continued with Tuesdays at 9:00 and the other evenings at 8:30. In 1940, the Casino Box Office, which was now located on Bellevue Avenue, opened one month in advance of the first play of the season. The theatre's need for money was becoming more apparent by the increased number of advertisements appearing

in the local newspaper.

The executive staff arrived one month in advance of the 1940 season. Rogers, one of the three new managers, was in charge of subscriptions. For the first time tickets became available for as low as fifty cents. The other scales included *SI*, \$1.50 and \$2.50 opening nights and \$1, \$1.50, and \$2, plus tax, for other evenings and the Thursday matinee.⁴² This last plan of the association was a decision which eventually worked to the management's detriment. The Casino had never been a locally accepted theatre, but only a wealthy one. To assimilate the theatre into the culture at large was at odds with the inherent philosophy which informed the Casino in the first place. The founding of the Casino as thought of and designated by Bennett and his associates was for the express purpose of diversion. It should be reiterated that the theatre was a component of a larger complex known as the Casino. Membership in the latter was by invitation only. On the other hand, the theatre depended on promotion and advertisement aimed at the general public. This inherent contradiction was a contributing factor to the ambivalence felt by many of the local people.

Reviewing the 1940 season at the theatre brings to mind the variety of plays which the Casino sponsored since Actor Managers took charge. The roster includes new plays, recent popular Broadway productions and revivals of old favorites with visiting stars supported by a resident company. It strongly suggests that the new group was relying on the types of plays which had already succeeded at Newport and was making a concerted effort to ensure the theatre's survival. This decision seems curious, since a new group usually wants to introduce innovative policies which distinguish them, but this was not occurring at the Casino. Edward Massey, an alumnus of George Pierce Baker's 47 Workshop at Harvard and founder of the Stage Guild in Boston, was scheduled to direct for the entire 1940

season, but did not make his directorial debut until 23 July with *At Mrs. Beams*. The play starred Stiano Braggiotti who had just spent over a year with the Barrymore company both on tour and in New York.

To attract more people, following the play, the Casino Theatre hosted a dance which was "held on the balcony of the theatre with no extra charge for admission." The dance floor was enlarged with Arcieri's orchestra furnishing the music. The Casino sponsored at least two dances, perhaps more. Records indicate that the second dance was at the close of *At l'Erso Beams*. Another innovation of the 1940 season was Monday's public seat sale with new reduced prices as an added feature to draw the locals. Two orchestra rows at fifty cents (plus tax) included Tuesday (opening night), Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday evening. All performances were priced from 50 cents to \$2.00 plus tax-except Tues., which was 50 cents to \$2.50, plus tax. This was a drop from Actor Managers' prices which were incredibly expensive by the dollar value of the time, particularly when one considers that the group was attempting to make the Casino a community theatre. The situation temporarily turned around when the word went forward among the wealthy who were left in Newport regarding the desperate situation at the Casino because that year many former patrons again supported the theatre along with additional new patrons. These subscription renewals were not just Newport people. It was as if those who still cared deeply about the theatre were trying to save that which, at a better time, had been one of the hallmarks of their own prosperity.

In 1940, plays such as *Blind Alley*, *No Time for Comedy*, *Not in Our Stars* and *Springtime for Henry* succeeded at the Casino. Actress Jane Cowl made an exception to her itinerary for Newport and appeared in a new version of Alexander Bisson's *Madame X*. The

final offering of the seventh season, which played for the week of 27 August, was Noel Coward's romantic comedy, *The Marquise*. It featured Violet Hemming, who had just completed a Players Club revival of Congreve's *Love for Love* in which she played Mistress Frail. She had appeared a number of seasons earlier when the summer colony had managed the theatre. Nicolas Joy, well known on Broadway and creator of the role of Katherine Hepburn's father in *The Philadelphia Story*, played opposite Hemming as the French Count. The Casino women managers continued the practice of contracting stars throughout the season. Their efforts were directed toward attracting patrons from a variety of experiences and tastes.

Even though the plays of 1940 had been managed by women with impressive theatre backgrounds, and it looked as if things were picking up for the theatre, one could conclude that the situation was not at its optimum since the three women managers disappeared following the 1940 season. The circumstances pertaining to their resignations are unclear. However, what is known is that the women remained only one season at the Casino. Whatever happened in 1940 more than likely gave the Casino officers pause for questioning their own judgment with respect to whom to entrust their theatre. Notwithstanding the marred first decision, the Casino officers were anxious to turn from the shadow of the 1940 season and were intent on getting the building back on its theatrical track. Fortunately for them, others were looking for a chance to succeed at Newport.

Continuance of the theatre for a seven-week season in 1941 was made possible by Mrs. Eleanor Farrington and Edward Massey⁴³ who leased the theatre under Massey-Farrington, Inc. of New York. This was the first time they had formed a producing and managing partnership. The duo seemed to reanimate the Casino with the production of such

plays as the musical comedy, *Paris*, and a Thurber-Nugent comedy, *The Male Animal*, Somerset Maugham's *The Circle* starring screen star, Karen Morley and Lillian Hellman's Pulitzer Prize drama, *The Little Foxes*. *The Firebrand*, based on the life of Benvenuto Cellini, and *Mr. And Mrs. Nonh* with its cast of twenty, followed. Finally, *The Man Who Came to Dinner* with Massey taking the role of Sheridan Whiteside, a character presumed to be a caricature of Alexander Woolcon, opened to a "completely sold out house." Under Farrington-Massey resident members included Alexander Kirkland, Hume Cronyn., Beverly Roberts, Mildred Natwick, Karen Morley, Margalo Gillmore, Lois Hall, Edward Trevor and Adrienne Ames. The season's success gave hope for a return of the same management for another year. However, the suicide-death of Edward Massey in 1942 was an unfortunate setback for the Casino community.

Because of this loss, the Casino officers were faced with new decisions. Would the theatre remain open, and if so, what would be offered for entertainment? The fact that films had been shown for a brief period in 1921 and again in 1926, would require little transonnation to prepare the theatre to open as a film house. A daily newspaper account mentions that the theatre was leased for the winter beginning in November 1939 to a Hyman Pastman from Charlestown, Massachusetts for "use as a neighborhood movie theatre most of the year with provision for legitimate plays during the summer months."⁴⁴ Pastrnan who leased the theatre booked Fine Arts releases for the house beginning on 25 November. "Fonnerly with Paramount, M and P, and more recently with Loew's Theatre syndicates" at one time he had managed the Colonial Theatre in Newport.⁴⁵ In addition, a woman by the name of Sara Stamm came forward prepared to direct some plays. The Casino officers felt, however, that it was too late in the season for anything to be planned.

The theatre remained closed in 1942 with Stamm being hired in 1943 to direct a full summer. Stamm, who had first appeared at the Casino Theatre in 1941 as general manager while Farrington was scenic designer and Massey director, would prove to be an important figure in the next direction of the theatre.

A Manhattan resident, Stamm was familiar with theatre in New York and that of summer stock taking place in New England and nearby environs. Cognizant of the theatre's early history under the summer colony and that of its later years when it was faltering under Actor Managers, Stamm fortified her efforts to recapture some of its past existence. Stamm was no stranger to the Casino officers either, since she had shown an interest in doing summer stock even before being hired in 1943.

From the beginning, Stamm's ideologies were incorporated into her assembly of new plans for the theatre. Her adoption of the amateur-professional system is best reflected in the strong resident company which she built up during her earliest years at the Casino. During her initial season, she procured actors mainly from the New York stage such as Ronald Telfer, Bruce Riley, Edna Eustace, Grace McTarnahan., Robert Carleton, Eva Korstand and Jack Ruth among others. As resident members, they not only worked alongside the local players, but also were able supports of the visiting stars who arrived at the theatre. In Stamm's first year, guests like Barbara Bel Geddes, Beverly Roberts, Ann Lee, Walter Appler, Clark Williams, Jeanette Chinley, and Guy Spaul became the vehicles through which the new manager realized her theatrical ambitions.

In an attempt to keep fresh ideas circulating and up-to-date works seen at her theatre, Stamm introduced not only superior actors but also new and outspoken voices in the world of playwriting. The works of Elmer Rice, Robert Sherwood, Lillian Hellman,

Kaufman and Hart, Terence Rattigan and John Van Druten were among the many represented on the Casino stage. In her earliest of seasons, and following, Stamm kept vital production concepts alive by hiring new artistic personnel nearly every season. Freeman Hammond directed in 1943 and 1944 and returned in 1947. Broadway, Hollywood and stock director Hudson Faussett staged the productions from 1945 to 1946. Scenic designer Michael Weightman-Smith was hired as set designer in 1944, and Donald Finlayson in 1945 along with Hollywood designer Richard Bernstein in 1946. These appointments reflected Stamm's contacts with New York artists and her resourcefulness in making good use of these connections.

As early as 1944, Stamm allowed scouts in the audience who were looking for new talent. The exposure afforded a higher visibility to her resident actors. Through this gesture she was trying to make a notable theatre more accessible to a larger number of New York producers. The record of weekly attendance at the performances showed the summer of 1944, which was twelve weeks, to be the longest in the theatre's history.⁴⁶ The support and enthusiasm shown by the patrons infused new life into the theatre as well as providing an extended season, necessary factors in keeping alive the image of a vital theatre with a nation-wide reputation.

In 1945, Stamm was employing stage, radio and screen stars. She attempted to introduce diversity through her dramatic selections. For example, she engaged the Metropolitan Opera ballerina, Maria Gambarelli,⁴⁷ as the lead in the season's opening of Noel Coward's *Blithe Spirit*, while closing the season with an innovative production of the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta *The Sorcerer* with the Light Opera Company from New York assisted by local singers and several members of the resident group.⁴⁸ The strategy supports

Stammfs firm conviction that the amateur-professional combination, one that had succeeded in theatres world-wide over the centuries, would best serve her purposes at Newport. Stammfs democratic approach to the theatre was an outward stamp of her inner persuasion as expressed in the motto printed on the bottom of her program cover proclaiming the Casino as "A Newport's Center of Entertainment."

Beginning in 1945, throughout one week each season, Stamm made an appeal at every Casino performance for contributions to the combined drive of the Actors' Fund and the American Theatre Wing and War Services. That same season, she brought Helen Arthur's earlier tribute to the actor a step further when she instituted the award of a Silver cup, bestowed on the actor who was voted best of the season. The award was conferred each September at Sardi's restaurant in New York during an intimate luncheon where Stamm gave her annual talk. The award continued for nearly fifteen years and, over time, a Gold Cup replaced the Silver one. Through this event, Stamm was merging the Newport theatre with her New York alliances.

Unshaken in her confidence that the Casino Theatre should be connected with the Newport community, Stamm became actively engaged in the affairs of the city. To commemorate the theatre's twentieth-anniversary season in 1946, Stamm produced a number of plays that not only had been Broadway successes but would attract a varied group. *The Philadelphia Story*, *The Hasty Heart*, *Angel Street* and *Young Woodley*, in which Van Druten made his name, were among the plays presented. She secured the world premiere of the stage version of *Casablanca* by special arrangements with Warner Brothers and retained Joy Ann Page in the same role she portrayed on the screen. Page became a member of the resident company for the summer. That year Stamm arranged living quarters

for the acting company who would eventually be housed in the neighborhood of the Theatre. The company arrived on 17 June to go into rehearsal for Clifford Goldsmith's *What A Life*. For the eleven-week season, Stamm continued with her actors award, an audience balloting for the outstanding performer of the season. For only the second annual Silver Cup Award, resident actors like Howard Wendell, Charles Lang, Delma Byron and John Heath were contenders.

During the 1947 season, Stanun kept the Casino house packed on many occasions with works such as one of Shaw's "pleasant plays," *Arms and the Man*, Benjamin Kaye's *The Curtain Rises*, *The Trial of Mary Dugan*, a melodrama by Bayard Veiller, *Arsenic and Old Lace* and *Dear Ruth*. The summer of 1947 was launched with Elmer Rice's Broadway success of the previous season, *Dream Girl*, with guest star Helen Marcy who had won praise some time earlier in the New York opening for her performance of the long and difficult role of Georgina Allerton.⁴⁹ Among the first nighters of *Dream Girl* that "opened to an audience of greater appreciation than size," were those of Newport's old guard, Hugh D. Auchincloss, Mrs. John Nicholas Brown, Mr. and Mrs. Stuart Duncan, Mrs. Theodore Grosvenor, Maxim Karolik, Mrs. Van Rensselaer, Mrs. Hamilton Fish Webster, and the Misses Edith and Maude Wetmore. Complementing this group was a naval contingent from the Newport War College. Among them included Admiral R.A. Spruance, Captain William S. Whiteside and Admiral P.H. Bastedo, a signal of the rising importance of the naval component that would prove important to Stamm's cause. A review of *Dream Girl* in the *Newport Daily News* referred to the play as "A directing combination of fantasy and reality.... some of the dream sequences played straight, some burlesqued and some stylized, all of which added to the diversion of the play."so

The Late George Apley, a John Marquand and George Kaufman comedy based on Marquand's satire of Beacon Hill Bostonians at the start of the century, was an enormous success at Newport. Even though the self-contained satisfaction of Boston's elite with its own tight little circle had its counterpart in many a New England community," Newport included, viewers of all ages, whatever their backgrounds, appreciated the play.⁵¹ In *The Petrified Forest*, a rousing gangster melodrama, Blaine Corder made a memorable appearance before a large Casino audience.

Stamm continued to recruit Broadway talent for her resident company. The year of 1947 included Dorothy Blackburn, Joan Morgan, William Remick, Nancy Pollock, Ruth Lorn (wife of Joseph Leon, Casino production and chief stage manager) and Tom Emlyn Williams. Williams differed from the others in that he was both a dramatist and an actor. During this year, the Casino appeared to reach a new peak of popular success with Grant Calhoun, Hollywood star of the motion picture *We/come Stranger*; Ward Donovan, star of then recent Broadway musical, *Toplitzky of Notre Dame*; and well known radio singer, Lewis Wilson, who won the 1947 Casino Silver cup. For the most part, Stamm's large and well chosen casts, where some actors made return engagements to the Casino, gave many of the season's regulars reason to believe that they were on speaking terms with the performers. It was not uncommon to see the audience mingling with the actors following the plays. In her attempts to link the Casino name with some of the foremost playwrights of the time, Stamm was bent on hiring those who had achieved some level of commercial success. She had included in her repertoire two additional Rattigan plays, *While The Sun Shines* in 1945 and *The Winslow Boy* in 1949. Rattigan, an extremely efficient craftsman, was considered one of England's phenomenal successes at the time. Even though Stamm's theatre was well-

provided for by several celebrated **dramatists**, it came at a high price to the Casino that was **trying** to balance an already shaky budget.

Despite outward appearances of success, the Casino board members realized that a sale of the theatre was **inevitable**. Besieged by increasing **expenses**, the Casino members were forced to take inventory of their economic **landscape**. The upkeep of the theatre alone in order to keep it operating in good condition was depleting already weakened **funds**. By 1948, these same stockholders, who had customarily ruled autonomously, found themselves in a paradoxical position. As much as they wanted to hold onto their theatre, they were desperate for funds to run the entire Casino complex. The decision to sell was a difficult one. Stamm received this news with great consternation. Local newspapers printed the announcements of the sale of the theatre as impressive bids came in from Boston, **Newport**, New York and elsewhere. "Sufficient proxies were received to authorize the vote..." And even though the stockholders minutes name some of the bidders, the "identities of the prospective purchases were not revealed" to the local newspapers.^{s2}

According to a study by Cecilia Manning entitled, *A Physical History of the Newport Casino*, the Casino's decision to sell its theatre "followed recent action in disposing of much of its unimproved land holdings bounded by Bellevue Avenue, E. Bowery and Freebody Street, South of the championship tennis court."^{s3} Both the selling of the land and the theatre were attempts to overcome their financial hardships. As was the custom, the sale of the Casino theatre needed to be voted by the stockholders or sharers. These stockholders gave the governors the authorization to sell the theatre. On 14 January, "A special stockholders meeting was conducted by Henry D. Phelps **president**, Forsyth. Wikes, Gustave J.S. White and Beverly A. Bogert.,⁵⁴ After all the bids **were** considered, the theatre was

sold to Sara Stamm on 14 February 1948 reportedly for \$35,000 dollars. Despite **competition**, the fact that Stamm was awarded the sale reinforces the Casino officers' appreciation of her commitment to the theatre and their confidence in her ability to carry on what they considered a revered tradition. After her five consecutive summers of management at the theatre (1943-1947), she not only brought seasons of success to the Casino but also earned a good name for herself: The fact that Stamm had indicated that the theatre would remain as is, also may have factored into the decision.

Stamm continued to operate the theatre as summer stock, "expanding its activities the year of its purchase in 1948 to include an Academy of Drama for post-graduate courses in dramatic arts with emphasis on voice and speech training."ss Students received practical experience with the major acting (resident) company. The students who were enrolled in New York in the spring, lfwith the expectation that they would come from various parts of the country," were introduced to their craft by accomplished performers.⁵⁶ The new theatre school as well as an attached children's theatre, that Stamm had formed prior to her theatre purchase, made consistent use of the professional and amateur combination that Stamm had incorporated earlier. In addition to professionals, Stamm's Newport school "took in amateurs and those who wanted to hone their acting skills." Stamm envisioned this theatre with an associated school where young and promising newcomers would learn the best possible skills of theatrical art.

The arrangement allowed for the Casino regulars, augmented by several newcomers each season, to give adequate support to the principals. The conservatory arrangement that Stamm established allowed experienced actors not only to tutor amateurs but also to provide her company with a theatrical respectability that continued to meet the standards of good

theatre. The plan met with Stamm's goals of bringing a high degree of professionalism to her newly owned institution. She implemented ideas that supported her philosophy which reinforced her dedication to standards by which she maintained a level of production that matched those characterized by the theatre since its inception.

Stamm's commitment to the idea of making theatre available to the general public was strongly enforced throughout her years at Newport. When it came to the question of the arts for all, she leaned on the side of democracy. According to the *Kiwanis Echoes*, a monthly newsletter of the Kiwanis Club of Newport, Stamm appeared as speaker at their regular meeting. Her attendance demonstrates a determination to provide theatre to the general public. The Kiwanis newsletter states that, on 17 June 1948, as owner and operator of the Casino theatre, Stamm attended a meeting of the club and spoke of the summer theatre program and its cultural benefits to Newport. Stamm's desire to make the Casino Theatre available as a place of public gathering prompted her numerous appearances at local venues.

As a theatre professional, Stamm continued to bring a high calibre of artists to the theatre. During the 1948 season, she implemented the policy of "name" stars and combined then current Broadway hits with revivals of past favorites from Broadway and Hollywood. Stamm's connection to Hollywood came from her association with Cecil Clovelly while both were with the Actors Theatre on Broadway. Clovelly, of New York, who was Stamm's new production manager during 1948, had a long theatrical experience of several types. "For six years he had directed plays for the American Theatre Wing." Before this, he "served for eight years with the late John Barrymore as actor and manager, was with Arthur Hopkins for eight years, directed musical shows for the Shuberts and was talent scout, test

director and coach for Paramount Pictures.,⁵⁷ Jean Barrere, son of the famous flutist, was Clovelly's valued stage manager.⁵⁸ Stamm attempted to keep the company in the public eye with well-planned publicity. At least one of her announcements ran in the April-May issue of *Theatre Arts* magazine in 1948, advertising the Newport Casino Theatre as "America's most famous summer theatre."⁵⁹ While casting for the Casino productions which started early in April, Stamm continued to make her New York headquarters at 1674 Broadway from which she planned her upcoming seasons.

In 1948, one of the most successful summers for the theatre under Stamm's stewardship, such noted successes as Mary Chase's *Harvey* and Van Oruten's *The Voice of the Turtle* were scheduled. The Casino opened with Ruth Gordon's semi-autobiographical play about her own stage struck-youth, *Years Ago*. Actress Hazel Dawn made a return to the stage after an absence of eighteen years, playing the part of the mother to her real-life daughter, Hazel Dawn. An entertaining touch is that Gordon's ambition to be on the stage was partly spurred by seeing the elder Dawn, who was a leading figure of the theatre during Gordon's time and appeared in *The Pink Lady*. Among other engagements at the Casino that season was Mary Malone in *Peg O' My Heart*. Written by J. Hartley Manners for his wife, the late Laurette Taylor, the play provided a wide range of dramatic talent for the lead. Although *Charley's Aunt* had a large cast, it served as a vehicle for the one comedy lead, Charles Purcell, who was a "natural" in the role. "To the audience he had a freshness that added new zip to the farce."⁶⁰ Geoffrey Lumb directed. That year Stamm changed the weekly matinee from Thursday to Wednesday, and the following season, increased the matinee offerings to two, Wednesday and Saturday, actions indicating that she was hopeful that the plays would draw increased attendance.

In 1949, the Casino company reached an even higher level of acceptance with the scheduling of well known stage and screen stars Basil Rathbone, John Loder, Jean Parker and Ian Keith. Gian-Carlo Menotti's twin musical plays, *The Medium* and *The Telephone* with the original New York company opened the eleven- week season on 27 June. As a result of Edward Everett Horton's recent success on the screen, Stamm convinced him to play a return engagement at the Casino in Noel Coward's then most recent play, *Present Laughter*, in which Horton had been touring. The actor brought with him several members of his original company to appear with those of the resident company of the Casino. Basil Rathbone appeared as the lead player in *The Heiress* by Ruth and Augustus Goetz, while John Loder, then "one of the rising stars of Hollywood" was featured in *For Love or Money*, the F. Hugh Herbert comedy.⁶¹ In Terence Rattigan's *The Winslow Boy*, a play of worthy material for the author, Alexander Clarke as Arthur Winslow, Ronnie's father, "was specially moving," and in the almost melodramatic role of Sir Robert Morton, eminent British barrister Ian Keith was seen "as bringing to the stage an imposing array of stagecraft, experience and tradition.,⁶² The largest first-night audience of the season witnessed "an outstanding performance by Sarah Churchill (Winston Churchill's daughter), Jeffrey Lynn and an accomplished cast" in Philip Barry's comedy, *The Philadelphia Story*. Produced by Stamm, with Dan Levin as director and Richard V. Hare as set designer, the theatre proved that it was still in vogue, the high point of which came when actor "Churchill [in an interview] called the local arrangements 'the best yet' in her current tour.,⁶³

During the early 1950s, actors known mainly through the American screen, figures as Tallulah Bankhead, Joan and Constance Bennett, Sir Cedric Hardwicke, Billie Burke, Edward Everett Horton, Helen Hayes and Olivia De Havilland were among those listed on

the Casino Theatre posters.⁶⁴

By 1951, Stamm repeated three productions which had taken place earlier in the Casino's history probably because they were still reliable stage vehicles for entertainment during a time when movies were a real threat to the life of resident companies and because Stamm believed that they would be popular at Newport. Providence born, Ruth Hussey made her only New England summer stock appearance in Ferber and Kaufinan's *The Royal Family* in which she had scored a success on Broadway during the winter. Shaw's *Candida* with Olivia de Havilland and Richard Shepard "nearly filled the theatre." Edgar "Kent seen in varied roles in the early years was welcomed back to appear in the production. And Stamm ended her full summer of plays with a repeat performance of Kaufinan and Hart's, *The Man Who Came to Dinner* with Burl Ives as Sheldon Whiteside and Kay Lyder as the great man's spirited secretary. Ramsey Burch directed most of the 1951 productions and also acted in them while Francis Mahard designed the sets and costumes. Given the available actors of the day, Stamm produced plays that satisfied the audience. Their reaction to the theatre's twenty-fifth anniversary season was that Stamm had "given Newport better plays, better performances, better all-around entertainment" than had been available in many years.

As a promoter of culture in the city, the theatre came up against another promoter of a different kind. In 1951, three pastors from the four Newport Catholic churches publicly admonished their parishioners for attending and condemned the Casino management for its production of Tennessee Williams's play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Referring to the play as "filth" and "a blight on the city" the priests were heavy voices of protest to a number of people who were in a position to heed the message.⁶⁵ As the account in the *Newport*

Mercury interpreted, an entire segment of the Newport population was asked to forego one of the more important contributions to American dramatic literature, "one which had been awarded the three most important honors a play can achieve." Even though the clergy's position appeared on the front page of the newspaper, the theatre management responded with a respectful but cogently argued position. As a part of the management's response, which appeared in the same newspaper (*Mercury*), it pointed out that *Streetcar* "had run two years in New York [when it was placed on the Catholic Legion of Decency's list], won a Pulitzer, the New York Critics Circle Award and the Donaldson Award," then considered three of the top honors in the theatre. Claire Luce, who played Blanche Dubois in Newport, had been seen on the stage and had held important roles for years. "She was the first American actress to be invited to play a year of Shakespeare at Stratford-on-Avon, England." The Casino's defense concluded by expressing that it was "proud of its reputation for consistency in offering the finest in drama and believe[d] that the presentation of Mr. Williams's play upholds that tradition"⁶⁶ The play performed for its usual one-week engagement with Claire Luce as Blanche and Phillip Kenneally as the untutored Stanley with Fran Benton playing Stella. Francis M. Mahard "cleverly represented the dingy interior rooms" while Ramsey Burch directed. The clergy example serves as a reminder that, as late as 1951, although the Casino Theatre had clashed with few ideologies and was respected for the standard of entertainment it provided, it was not without its moments of censorship.

Despite the unwanted and unpleasant controversy, the 1951 season continued with other successes at the Casino. Basil Rathbone made a return engagement directing and starring in Aldous Huxley's melodrama-mystery, *The Gioconda Smile*. Rathbone adapted it from the New York production that ran successfully a season earlier on Broadway. *The*

Chocolate Soldier, a Strauss operetta based on George Bernard Shaw's *Arms And the Man*, starring Ernest McChesney as Lieutenant Bluntschli and Mildred Ellor as Nadina received raves. *Susan And God* by Rachel Cruthers with Joan Bennett and Walter Coy playing opposite her as Barrie Trexel shared honors "in a first class performance." Opera singer Lawrence Tibbet played the first straight dramatic role of his career starring in *Rain*, the W.Somerset Maugham drama. Tibbet's vocal gifts were not ignored either "with the singing of "Lead, Kindly Spirit" from offstage, giving the audience an extra dividend. Residents of the company who served as a well-chosen group of supporting members included Sylvia Syms, Al Thaler, Florence Bray, Marc Dana, Mary-Alice Wunderle, Stewart Baker and Charles Nelson Reilly. Others of the company who had leads during the season were Fran Benton, Don Hirst, Joseph Allen, Jr., Anne Francine and Jean Casto, Betty Hairston, Rugh Saville and Arnold Spector who directed three of the season's shows.

In the 1952 season, Stamm's succession of plays basically were of the same quality as those seen while the theatre was under colony control. Under her management that year, many performers appearing at the Casino were well known film stars. The list of featured players included Eva Gabor, Vincent Price, Kay Francis, Helen Hayes, Dana Andrews and Beatrice Lillie. Stamm's choices brought satisfaction to enthusiastic audiences who were looking for a touch of Hollywood to add to their enjoyment. As managing director and owner of the theatre, Stamm made several improvements to the building over the years. She redecorated several areas of the facility and refurbished the former tennis dressing rooms to house classes for apprentices. She left her individual imprint through her reallocation of space for the purpose of executing her own concepts. In spite of all Stamm's innovations and her successful productions, the Casino days of notability were numbered.

As early as 1954, six years following Stamm's purchase of the theatre, the entire Casino complex was in danger of being sold to a Providence real estate firm. The public outrage voiced in the newspapers regarding the sale reached a high pitch. One newspaper columnist worded it this way. "We think most of the share-owners are people who can ignore the attraction of quick profits in favor of retaining a focal point of community which is unique in this country." In his plea to keep the Casino intact, he mentions that "under vigorous, democratic leadership in [then] the last few years, the Casino has[d] been made available to many Newporters, not just the society Four Hundred."⁶¹

Regardless of Stamm's herculean efforts, the theatre was again facing a period of decline, needing the largesse which once had supported it. The substantial gifts which were given by the summer colony in pre Stamm time were conspicuously absent. It must have been a disheartening scene to Stamm, since in former years, the theatre had been identified with loyal patrons who were lovers of theatre and could afford the choicest entertainment available. Their participation in events at the Casino were extensions of their homes. Some had donated flowers and valuable heirlooms to add to the sets when appropriate. Even the box parties at the Casino Theatre could be seen as a continuation of their pre-theatre dinner parties. Although Stamm drew on her many professional resources and had a great amount of passion for her theatre, the financial capital of the past was no longer available. The desperateness of the situation forced Stamm to pander to other groups to sustain her theatre.

The aforementioned factors that influenced Stamm's situation forced her to seek alternate means to run her theatre. Under her ownership, the theatre was no longer limited to members of the social register. Rather, she attempted to make it a democratic institution. For the most part, she temporarily succeeded in providing entertainment for all the

inhabitants of Newport and environs. In order to keep her theatre **operating**, she elected a group who, at the **time**, was a stable force within the city, the naval colony.

During the aftermath of World War II, a growing element in Newport which provided the badly needed support, was the naval population. The officers of the Newport Naval Base were Stamm's answer to her theatres temporary survival. She relied on them and catered to their needs. For example, in her democratic way, she provided special nights where she charged only \$1 for the young enlisted sailors to attend the theatre. They took advantage of this generous offer in great numbers, and the plan was very successful for a time. Stamm was acquainted with some of the naval officers, and many of the pre-theatre dinner parties were now being given by the officers and their wives. For the most part, the navy were replacing the summer enclave as the visible supporters of the theatre and was fast becoming the new elite seen consistently in the audience. Among the devotees of the theatre were Admiral R.A. Spruance, Rear Admiral T.R. Cooley, Captains H. Crommelin, W.V. Hamilton, L.N. Hart, W.E. Miller, F. Moosburgger, W.A. Riley F.L. Robbins and Commanders W.F. Weaver and A. Wildner.

Although familiar Newport faces were still in evidence as late as the season of 1959, along with an enthusiastic naval contingent, the support was not effective enough in keeping the theatre running. With the revitalization of the Bellevue Avenue area in 1958 and an increased interest from the naval circles, Stamm was hopeful for an "upswing of activity at the box office." She held out hope that the two newly developed shopping centers would have a salutary affect on patronage at the theatre.ⁿ⁶⁸ For the summer of 1959, she had hired as production stage manager Phillip Meister who had been associated with the New York production of O'Neill's *Long Days Journey Into Night* and the revival of *The Iceman*

Cometh. Meister also was in charge of the apprentices that season, of which there were alternately between nine and fifteen. Barry Mansfield worked as scenic designer and Fields Varner, a newspaper man from Alabama, was Stamm's public relations director. Yet, during the time that Stamm was in control of the theatre, the makeup of the audience changed. For the most part, the audience on which the Casino now relied for support was lessening in numbers. The motive behind the founding concepts of the theatre was no longer the driving force which it had been originally.

Presumably, Sara Stamm attempted to bring back the flourish of the 1930s when the colonists displayed a style for which Newport had become known. But a number of significant factors, including the shifting status of the American actor, were instrumental in eliminating a secure future for the Casino. When Stamm owned and operated the theatre, many of the better known Broadway stars were settled in Hollywood. The actors were in a position to demand an exorbitant amount of money for their skills which would be no different from the rock stars of today. The new circumstances contributed to cutting short the type of life that Stanun tried to ensure for the Casino. Despite the fact that the theatre could still draw popular actors, it could no longer afford to pay them. The new star system that was exhibited through the medium of film offered higher salaries and a wider exposure for the actor. The severity of the situation at the Casino during the late 1950s prompted Stamm to acknowledge to a Massachusetts newspaper columnist that she had paid more for the salary of one actor, Ezio Pima, during that summer than she did for the rest of the cast's salaries combined.⁶⁹ The financial strains placed on the theatre edged it ever closer to the brink of bankruptcy. From 1943 to 1959, however, Stamm used her theatrical expertise and influence to procure the best that theatre had to offer. Nevertheless, the new forum of the

film was inevitably bringing about the death of summer stock, of which the Casino had enjoyed a relatively long tradition. From 1927 to 1959, the Casino operating exclusively as a theatre had consistently sponsored successful runs. It had been for many years one of the more popular summer diversions patronized by a group with a love for the drama.

Also, for many, the experience of acting at the Casino had been memorable. A number of actors had a particular fondness for the Casino and offered aid during the troubling years of the 1950s. Not only did it have an established reputation as first-rate summer stock, but, as a manager, Stamm had paid her workers generously, an inspiration for some, E.G. Marshall and Charlton Heston among them, who were booked by Stamm in the 1940s, to return to the Casino in 1956 to play at no charge. The actors did not look on this as a kind gesture as much as an act of gratitude for the years when they had spent their summers performing in Newport. To form a picture of the type of financial stability that the Casino had provided under Stamm's leadership, one only has to read Bill Gale's article in the *Newport Daily News*. Gale writes that "an actor had confessed [to him] that he had received five times the salary at the Casino than [at] the Playhouse in Dennis on the Cape."⁷⁰ In the final analysis, however, the generous salaries provided by Stamm were at a great cost to the theatre.

In spite of the changing social mores, Stamm was able to keep the theatre operative for seventeen years. But the glory of her achievements was not enough to sustain the momentum. With the costs escalating and the patronage of the wealthy dwindling, her victory was not to continue. In spite of all of her accomplishments, Stamm was unable to overcome the odds that were facing the Casino. The number of external factors inevitably doomed the Casino.

During a time of rapid social change, an establishment like the Casino could no longer compete with places offering a wider variety of entertainment. It was a period when the larger movie theatres like the Paramount and the Colonial in Newport had a financial advantage over the smaller intimate theatres such as the Casino. Because of their much larger capacities these theatres could bring in large sums of revenue to support their endeavors. Given audience overall fascination with film and the Casino's dwindling financial resources, the cavils of the theatre were accentuated. Unfortunately, Stamm became ill in 1956 which forced her temporarily to relinquish the management of the theatre. That year, she leased it to two young men "Spofford Beadle and Michael Howard of New York, who reported a financial loss at the end of [this] season"^{u71} In 1957 and 1958, the curtain did not rise. Even though, in 1958, Stamm had leased her theatre to actor, Kevin McCarthy, he did not operate it and the theatre remained closed for the summer. Stamm herself took over operation again in 1959 which proved to be her last season. Although it reopened for this final year under Stamm's leadership, it closed again when Stamm became too ill to continue. Kevin McCarthy and E.G. Marshall tried to buy the theatre in 1959, but the plans "fell through." Meanwhile, the money demands of Hollywood along with the pressure to keep the stars appearing on its stage were pushing the Casino Theatre into further debt from which it could not recover. When one of the country's pioneer summer theatres had reopened after two seasons of darkness (1957 and 1958) only to close its doors one final time under Stamm's leadership, this marked the end of James Gordon Bennett's undertaking. The cessation of plays at the Casino signaled the end of the colonists' expectations of it, and closed a prestigious chapter of Newport theatre history.

The situation was becoming so desperate that, after another unsuccessful attempt in

1960 to sell the theatre, "Stamm (reluctantly] decided to demolish it with [the] hope that she could at least get some revenue from a parking lot." Money costs for the upkeep, rising taxes on the property and thin support in a year when her physical strength was ebbing ultimately drained not only Stamm's energies but the theatre's resources as well.

Stamm's efforts to make the Casino Theatre more democratic could be seen as an unsuccessful attempt to save the theatre. From every indication, Stamm was a sharp-minded, business-like, no-nonsense person, a good choice to make the Casino Theatre successful following some very lean years. When the cultural elite had gone from the Casino, Stamm not only wanted to maintain the theatre's concept as it had been intended by the originators, but also tried to expand its boundaries to include a larger audience. In this endeavor lies an irreconcilable conflict because Stamm's efforts were moving in two different directions. A theatre which had been home to and property of Newport's cultural elite was never intended to be a public forum for all. Regardless of how able a businesswoman Stamm appeared to have been, the circumstances created a situation that proved too much to overcome. There seemed to be no other alternative other than Stamm converting the Casino's mission to a public one. What had been a value-driven enterprise for the Newport colonists had now lost its base. The thinking and purpose behind the founding of the Casino in the first place no longer fit the expanded entertainment opportunities of the mid twentieth-century.

When Sara Stamm retired from the Theatre in 1959, it signified the end of James Gordon Bennett's vision for the Casino theatre that began back in 1881. As a desirable spot for the rich, these years had demonstrated the symbiotic relationship that existed between the theatre and the summer colony. In 1963, the theatre rose once more from the ashes when

it was reopened through the generous gift of Mrs. Margaret Louise Broguere, one of the remaining grand dames of Newport. Renamed for her son, James Van Alen, a wealthy tennis enthusiast, the theatre continued as a new entity with little resemblance to the past. It functioned without its former distinction for approximately twenty years, principally as a community theatre. Amidst the thriving life of the Casino complex, the Newport Casino Theatre today remains as a storage building for the International Tennis Hall of Fame. A small unattractive sign remains on the side of the theatre, identifying it as the Casino Theatre. Does a new life await it once again?

CONCLUSION

THE PATRONS' THEATRE. A BEGINNING AND AN END

James Gordon Bennett, inheritor of a prosperous newspaper, built a theatre in 1881 that succeeded in offering entertainment to Newport's wealthy summer patrons, and sporadically over the years, until 1959, sustained a tradition that upheld excellence in the arts. In assessing the Casino Theatre's history, it may be said that the colonists were New Yorkers at heart who recreated their own sophisticated world in Newport. The patron audience appreciated the New York stage and delighted in experiencing it at their relaxed summer retreat. From the late nineteenth century onward, the idea of attracting reputable artists succeeded because money was available to promote the Casino project. At that time, the wealthy could afford to sponsor the pinnacle of good theatre. However, as a series of crushing events unfolded - escalating federal income taxes, world wars, economic crises - the situation culminated into changed fortunes for many of the summer colonists.

The Casino never became a permanent theatre as some strove to make it, as much as it became a symbol of the type of unique wealth that existed in Newport for a time. As Newport society followed its course of destiny, what unfolded at the Casino was a direction that yielded to pleasure, power and privilege. Along with the Newport mansions, the Casino Theatre stands out as a reminder of a lifestyle that speaks for the values that gave birth to the fancies of the American wealthy. The Casino constituents, bound by their interests and wealth, conducted events at their club with elitism and autonomy. For them, it

was America at its best.

When the Casino Theatre entered the Newport cultural arena in 1881, it was to parallel nearly one century of rapid social, economic and artistic changes. The graceful and dignified lifestyle which had characterized the Newport literati of the 1870s personified by figures such as novelist and psychologist Henry and William James, biologist Alexander Agassiz, suffragist Julia Ward Howe, and poet-essayist Oliver Wendell Holmes was counter-blasted only a decade later by individuals who succeeded in dramatically changing the cultural complexion of the city. At a period when the cultural elite were comfortably settled as permanent residents in the city, their circumstances were directly responsible for the distinct life of the theatre.

It may be said that the wealthy Casino patrons were a subculture unwilling to diversify.' In a status/money-conscious era, the earliest patrons of the theatre were not interested in diversity. To admit a pluralistic public into their social life was a basic contradiction in the minds of individuals whose lives were immersed in a separate world of firsts and onlys. From its inception, the Casino was a culture of one, having its own rules, society, mores, money and theatre.

The theatre's basic form of capital drawn from the summer colonists caused it to exist principally as a theatre of patronage. Although individuals across the social and economic spectrum were invited to enjoy the Casino Theatre's offerings, the wealthy constituents alone, who paid for the Casino's subsistence, had sovereign rights over their Casino undertaking. One might say that the Casino was a public institution under private domain, and, as such, precluded any free access by the "other Newport." Even though the naval officers and civilian populations of Newport were devoted attendees of the theatre, it

obviously belonged to the archetypes of legendary American wealth from the start. The public was excluded from full participatory membership in the varied activities of the Casino complex. Those who had assumed a monopoly over leisure time had navigated that same right within the confines of their club where the order of the day was epicurean in nature.

The wealthy habitués of the Stanford White Playhouse at Newport were the first to make the theatre known to a nation. Dedicated to the goal of **pleasure**, they never spared expense when it came to their institution. Willing to accept the monetary responsibility of the Casino **Theatre**, the patrons spurred not only the theatre's growth but also its name for high style and exceptionally costly but good entertainment. Did the financial backers of the Casino institution view their patronage as some type of honor or was it strictly an ego inflator? As subsidy can take many **forms**, perhaps Newport of the late nineteenth century could be considered in some way as a variation of the classical equivalent of the wealthy Greek 'Choregus' or perhaps the 'Angels' who backed plays on Broadway or Shaftesbury Avenue. Either way, Newport was in full theatre swing with the Casino, which was a barometer of the tastes and attitudes of a group in Newport during a period of hopeful optimism for some. The early disciples of the Casino Theatre had crafted for themselves an image that upheld the daring venture of James Gordon Bennett.

During the 1880s, an era when Newport was reinventing itself, the city became one of the more enviable places to be for those of a high visibility where style was not a luxury but a necessity. The Casino at Newport became the meeting ground where money and culture converged. The two decades on either side of 1900 would prepare the city for the finest era of the Casino Theatre when it took its place among the prestigious summer

theatres throughout the country. The results of the Casino phenomenon raised the cultural stakes at Newport to a level where the Casino Theatre between 1927 and 1934 culminated in a theatrical golden age.

During the late 1920s and into the 1930s, through the genius and involvement of its wealthy leaders, this little theatre swept out and encompassed the larger world of theatrical expression, adding a superb dimension to the city. Established to promote the well being of a group who had pledged themselves to a total enjoyment of leisure, the very basis of the theatre was prompted directly by the importance of its patron audience. Adjusting classical theorist Horace's "to delight and to instruct," to suit their own purposes, the colonists made "to please and to delight" the first rule of the Casino Theatre as the members whiled away the hours of a summer evening. The club-centric individuals made the Casino sacred ground. The colonists' community, an urbane coterie, insisted on the best in the social and artistic aspects of the theatre.

Even though the Casino was similar to various summer theatres, it was atypical with respect to architecture, money and audience. Suffused with a Victorian elegance, the theatre reflected the peculiar opulence of Newport during this period. In an era when "rural straw-hat theaters were springing up in barns all over New England, the Casino Theater maintained its stately pre-eminence," which was a departure from the summer theatre concept. Ironically, the Casino was referred to by some as the "bam theatre," not because it maintained the rustic ambiance of the straw-hatters that characteristically designated summer stock, but because it was built on the remains of a small bam.² Listed today on the National Register of Historic Places, the Casino Theatre in its full Victorian splendor was a shining tribute to Newport architecture and hardly a representation of most summer theatre

structures.

Another exception from the summer theatres, in general, was the type of audience member. If audience response is any indicator of the success of a theatre, the wealthy at Newport, who combined a tradition of the past with an attitude of the present, was a formidable influence. Making up the nucleus of the Casino audience, their opinions could deliver an impact as influential as any Broadway critic's might similarly affect a new play. The grandees of America, whose imagination and desires directed their whims and judgments shaped a theatre's reputation for sophisticated and quality entertainment. The elegance that prevailed, both on the stage and in the house until the mid- 1930s, more than anything else, serves as a fulcrum for the rise and fall of fortune, the balance of which is reflected in a lifestyle now faded. In a period transfixed by wealth, style and status, the expression of their lives, the way that they lived, enmeshed these people into the extended world of the theatre. The matinees, "pre" and "post" dinner parties, light lunches and receptions for the players appearing at the Casino were a weekly ritual. For many, drama at the Casino was transmuted into life.

Scholar-critic Martin Esslin, in his analysis of the nature and contribution of drama, speaks of the most social of the art forms as a "collective creation." Esslin states that "the playwright, the actors, the designer, the costume maker, the provider of props, the lighting designer..., and [even] the audience, by its very presence" contribute essentially to what drama is all about.³ While it is true that all these components facilitate the unduplicated experience which is theatre, something further can be said of the audience at Newport. What was different regarding the Casino was the level of participation of its patron audience. Even in its experience of the theatre, the group was actively involved in the decisions

affecting the choices and execution of the plays. Those sponsored were not only due to colony influence but also because of the opulence that prevailed from the Casino's earliest days. Patron participation was imposing since these people were in a position to determine what plays they wanted and had the means to have their desires met. Even the actual construction of the theatre employed an increasing number of draftsmen, carpenters, and electricians that provided jobs for the local workers and boosted the economy of Newport. What was interesting about the history of this theatre is that the wealthy audience functioned as subtext; this was not true, in the same sense, of other summer theatres. The life beneath the surface, significantly influenced all the variables comprising the Casino complex. The atmosphere of the theatre life, in particular, and the mystique surrounding it were a prescription for transcendence which characterized late nineteenth- and twentieth-century living attached to cultural Newport.

In retrospect, it should be appreciated that at the center of the Casino Theatre story were women. Their aspirations and accomplishments are an important component in the life of the Casino theatre. The contributions of a number of women directly associated with the Casino tradition including Edith Taylor-Nicholson, Lillian Barren, Helen Arthur, Agnes Morgan and Sara Stamm cannot be overlooked. Taylor had been the backbone of her husband's initiative to transform the Stanford White ballroom into a regular theatre, and at his death was responsible for closely assisting William H. Vanderbilt in its continuance. The tireless efforts of Lillian Barrett had brought an early flush of success to the Casino theatre. For the five years between 1935 and 1939, Helen Arthur was dedicated to promoting culture through the theatre, and her director-playwright, Agnes Morgan, whom Arthur knew from their days at the Neighborhood Playhouse, was instrumental in directing

many successful productions. Sara Stamm was driven to bring theatre to as many people as possible. Stamm's view was that all had a right to the arts, and she spoke at local group meetings to promote her ideas in the city where she labored unsuccessfully to use her New York influences to make this dream a reality.

The work of these self-directed women of twentieth-century Newport parallels that of the women living in the nearby estates. Each, as overseers of their domain, sought to legitimize their tastes and promote a praxis all their own. More specifically, those managing the Casino Theatre were aiming to foster the arts, while the estate women were validating their opulence. These women who had designed and designated their own palatial space at home, were not linked to the women at the theatre but rather each group, taken separately, had designed and executed space as a way of self-expression. Even though the women of wealth saw the management of their homes as a natural extension of their responsibilities as women, the type of demonstrated power involved the whole pleasure component inherent in creating culture. The magnitude with which the estates were run could be likened to the management of a theatre. Each "institution" had a budget, and both estate and theatre duties included such tasks as the coordination of gala events, the hosting of benefits or charities, the ordering of flowers, the drawing up of guests lists, the hiring of orchestras, the handling of seating arrangements, the soothing of temperaments, and a host of additional tasks required in both spheres. The female sensibilities both of the colony women and the managers of the Casino Theatre had dominated for fifty years (1883-1933) and left a unique social impact on Newport culture.

One way in which the lives of the wealthy in Newport during the late 1930s through the 1950s could be viewed is in terms of what the country was experiencing. First, the

aftermath of the stock market crash was felt, although **delayed**, by Newport's wealthiest. Many lost a substantial portion of their fortunes which altered their lives significantly. The money troubles during the 1930s forced many a "gentleman" to be more resourceful regarding his financial future.

In addition to serious financial losses, the double impact of two World Wars robbed many of their idealism. The First and Second World Wars blasted away more than human lives. The devastation gradually eroded the traditional belief systems which up until this time had worked for many. The senseless carnage of two World Wars effected attitudinal changes. The value system which many had relied on since childhood no longer furnished the answers to life's questions. And past principles were subjected to severe scrutiny as skepticism was growing fashionable both in Europe and the United States.

The reaction to extreme loss and an attempt at redefining one's place within the culture expressed itself in various ways throughout the country. The arts provided an important way in which people tried to restructure their lives. Many attempted to replace old values with ones that could sustain them as they faced a changing world. While the probing scripts of such socially conscious playwrights as Elmer Rice, Maxwell Anderson and, a decade later, Clifford Odets were advertising their social realism on the New York stage, the Newport response appeared to possess a more genteel and less strident style. Newport's reaction expressed itself in a retreat to Broadway's lighter distractions. From its inception, the basis of the Casino Theatre had been a means of relaxation and diversion. For the most part, the oases of light summer fare were the staple through which the **luxury** of this class expressed itself.

Newport's response to the futility of purpose appears to have been a retreat to the

more carefree Broadway offerings, comedies in particular. The diversion derived from the hilarious farces of a Kaufman and Hart, the lightweight high comedies of a Frederic Lonsdale or Somerset Maugham and various types of escapist melodramas and mysteries seemed to ease the impact of a new reality. While the works of some playwrights came out of a frustration with the culture, the Casino continued to celebrate its own extravagance of life. The level of money which the colonists once possessed had furnished them with an experience of life second to none. Possessing extreme wealth provided them the ability to live extravagantly. While suffering through financial hardships of which they had not been accustomed, some tried to continue under the pretense that all was the same. Even while retaining their characteristic behavior, the shifting boundaries of reality eventually racked Newport.

Since the earliest years of theatrical expression, the scourges of war have taught difficult lessons. When confronted with this, the summer colonists had to reevaluate the basis of their own existence. The Newport colonists had valued life from the possession and experience of money. The colonists had created a good part of their reality based on the value of the dollar. Their lifestyle was being challenged and they were forced to contemplate a different reality. The whole value system of the colonists was based on money, and, when it was lessened, a great shift in thinking was demanded of them. By this time, the Casino, devoid of the depth of luxury which it had enjoyed, and the frivolous nature which characterized the experience of its patrons, had faded. Like every major upheaval, the events which shook middle-century-America, including Newport, had reshuffled social values. At the Casino, the inveterate insularity had lost its hold, and old lines became dimmer and dimmer and finally faded away.

The Casino Theatre survived into the middle part of the twentieth century mainly because its leaders put it on a course that was strong enough to keep it on track for a number of years. The impetus which it received from its first owners was deemed good enough to be followed by artistically-minded managers. The wealthy permanent summer residents at Newport may not have been theatre people, but what they had established was respected and adhered to by professionals of the theatre world. The theatre that resided on the Casino grounds had a flawed but fascinating history. Although at times it lost momentum, the success of the theatre was due not only to its superior artists but also to the colonists. Only a part of the stellar cast of performers was on the stage. The genius of their counterparts, the patron audience, had sustained the theatre for decades and brought it to the point of imitation by its subsequent managers.

When the post-Depression years signaled an economic downturn, the colonists upheld their characteristically whimsical attitude causing an intractable situation for the Casino. For example, in 1934, when the colony was no longer able to afford its high standards of quality actors and directors, the Casino managers continued to hire them anyway. The huge aspirations coupled with intemperate spending made an already fragile budget finally collapse. The spending was relentless, and the darling of the Casino complex took the punishment. Following the Depression, the financial strength of the Casino weakened over the decades and faded, but not before it had established a new cultural tradition of theatre.

In 1927, after the Stanford White ballroom was converted into a legitimate theatre, the presence of the big stars became a ritual observance. During the next eight years in which the summer colonists governed their theatre, the resident company sustained a core of

actors while admitting new ones each summer. The major stars were imported from New York backed by a local resident company consisting of highly skilled actors **with** many minor roles given to the colonists. Because of this **arrangement**, the theatre gave the wealthy, some who themselves were amateur actors, an unparalleled chance to appear before an influential audience and to act alongside a group of esteemed actors.

The Casino had employed a number of experienced Theatre Guild **actors**, among them Frederick Worlock, Harold Webster, Edgar Kent, Ernest **Cossart**, Ina Claire, Eugene Powers, Rollo Peters, Philip Tonge, and France Bendsten, many of whom returned to the Casino and sustained a reliable acting tradition. Maria Ouspenskaya, who had trained with Stanislavsky, and was heading the American Laboratory Theatre with Richard **Boleslavsky** in New York, appeared in Newport several times. American actors like the "infinitely gifted" Pauline Lord and Jane Cowl demonstrated their varied talents at the Casino. Leading women of the world stage such as Violet Hemming, Eugenie Leontovich, Suzanne Caubaye and Violet Kemble Cooper came from respected backgrounds and brought the Casino to a level on a par with world-recognized performers. Renowned actors as Basil Rathbone, Whitford Kane and Robert Loraine also brought a dimension of superior craftsmanship. Younger personalities through Cornelia Otis Skinner, Mary Hone, Sanchia Forbes and Mary Howard provided new faces on the Casino stage.

The characteristic team efforts and dynamic energy of the entire cast in a production were commendable in every aspect and continued the good name of the Casino. The ensemble acting emphasized during colony control cultivated a practice that influenced its successive managers. Classically **trained** actors collaborated **with** actors from the naturalistic school to assure good theatre on the small stage. **Overall**, the plays sustained the

general high standards of acting and production, a feat which is credited to the colonists as well as to the actors. The successful Casino resident company of actors, directors and designers, would leave their indelible impression on the successive management. The Casino became a staging ground for hope, not only for the actor needing work in the heat of the summer, but also for the Newport colonists who were determined to make their own theatrical statement. The wealthy audience selectively curried favor with the leading actors of the day. Week after week, the cultural elite yielded to an actor's word or a playwright's phrase, signaling the frivolity of the patrons of the Newport theatre.

Not only strong actors and a professional execution of major productions, but a varied selection of plays that sponsored new voices in playwriting occurred. During the 1930s, when plays in the realistic tradition were especially fruitful, the colony's rich exploitation of comedy through the writings of Philip Barry, S.N. Behnman, Robert Sherwood and Kaufman and Hart, among others, confirmed patron seriousness in keeping the Casino contemporaneous with the writers of the day. Realism survived in many of the plays produced by the Casino. Noel Coward's realistic comedies of manners, for example, were extremely popular. Even though Coward's career was mostly over by the 1930s, his plays, still attractive to worldwide audiences, were extremely well received at Newport.

For the most part, while under colony control, the Casino plays presented were a variety of melodramatic thrillers, farces, drawing room comedies and serious dramas. The Casino brought the plays of Brighouse, Molnar, Crothers, Cohan and Barrie to the Newport audiences. The intellectual repartee of a George Bernard Shaw play was as stirring as Shakespeare's brooding *Hamlet*. The eccentricities of the characters in George Kelly's *The Torchbearers* proved to be as interesting to the Casino patron audience as Sidney Howard's

The Late Christopher Bean or Edward Childs Carpenter's mystery-thriller, *Whistling in the Dark*. In addition to traditional plays, the Casino often broke with tradition. Risks were taken by the management in bringing something different to their stage. The premieres of Jerome Ross's *The Man in the Zoo* and Somerset Maugham's *The Breadwinner* and, as out of subscription season, the native African opera, *Kylcunkor*, which was mainly to draw a wider audience during financially declining years, proved that the colonists were able to take a risk to assure the continuance of their financially troubled theatre.

When in 1935, the ownership of the Casino Theatre passed from colony management to Actor Managers, a theatrical producing agency from New York, the group basically failed to perpetuate a tradition which was formerly hosted by a long New York line of wealth. Actor Managers was no match for the former spendthrifts. The scion of the wealthy class clashed with the penury of Actor Managers whose own impecunious condition, before long, revealed serious financial difficulties.

After the colonists were no longer in charge, subsequent managements, all of whom were from New York, attempted to continue a like pattern set by the colonists. All attempted to satisfy the patron audience's desire for proved successes and modern productions. Despite the heavy royalties for new shows and the cost of productions with recognized stars, each group was determined to uphold the Casino reputation for superior entertainment while maintaining their own good name as theatre specialists. Massey and Stamm even scaled down the prices in order to attract as many new patrons as possible. When Stamm became the new owner in 1948, she struggled to continue the rich tradition of the Casino for another ten years. She secured screen actors like Edward Everett Horton, Grant Calhoun, Lewis Wilson, Joan Morgan and Basil Rathbone among a long list of talent.

She brought back to the Casino England's commercial successes as Terence Rattigan (*While the Sun Shines*, *French Without Tears*, *The Winslow Boy*), and John Van Druten (*Young Woodley*, *The Voice of the Turtle*) and produced newer types of modern American classics such as Kaufman and Hart's *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, **Barry's** *The Philadelphia Story*, and the world premiere stage version of *Casablanca*.

Stamm initiated a dramatic acting academy, instituted a Silver Cup award for acting excellence, consistently maintained professionals of the New York type to support her plans for Newport, and produced such Pulitzer Prize-winning plays as Lillian Hellman's *The Little Foxes* and Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*. By 1944, Stamm managed to achieve the longest running summer of plays (twelve weeks) in the theatre's history. However, eventually it was realized that the theatrical aesthetic of the colonists was not to be outmatched, only to be imitated.

In the 1940s, the crippling money demands of Hollywood were crushing to a theatre already buckling under financial strains. For many seasons following colony management, however, stock companies and Broadway stars appeared regularly at the theatre. With a budget that was teetering on the brink of collapse, Stamm continued with her Hollywood contingent of stars, among them Olivia de Havilland, Basil Rathbone, Billie Burke, Burl Ives, Eva Gabor and Helen Hayes who appeared on the Casino stage. The richness of the Casino tradition that Stamm strove to preserve would push the theatre into a debt from which it could not recover.

Trying to maintain the same level of excellence, without the financial endorsement of the colonists, exacerbated the theatre's already overextended budget. The final private owner of the theatre, Sara Stamm, between 1943 and 1959, appeared to adopt the previous

mentality held by the early founders: an outstanding quality of theatre secured by abundant resources. Seduced by the attractive early life of the theatre, and willing to spend substantial amounts of money for its **survival**, Stamm appears to have fallen into the same trap of money results in luxury, an idea for which the theatre was formerly celebrated.

Sara Stamm's solution for the ailing Casino, however, was unsuccessful. Her additional idea of bringing the city to the theatre did not work either because from the beginning it had been envisioned as an arena for the entitled. The Casino Theatre had been a place unique in purpose: it was the sole operation belonging to those of means who had been putting money into it for years until they were no longer able. Stamm admired the panache of the Casino theatre while under colonists' rule and tried desperately to continue providing top billing at the theatre. However, as the cost of everything was rising, and the group with exclusive money had become scarce, the same dreams could not be realized. The patrons of the Casino had died, and in the 1940s their heirs were selling the large estates and leaving Newport. The demise of the colonists' world and values ultimately led to an unfortunate end for the theatre.

The early 1930s actually began the downward spiral which continued unabated through the late 1950s and led to the theatre's temporary closing under Stamm in 1960. Sara Stamm, and others, tried to raise the theatre to its former pinnacle once again, but, in reality, Stamm continually overextended the budget and edged the theatre ever closer to the brink of bankruptcy. Also, at a time when the Hollywood stars were breaking the stock system, the theatre's five hundred seats could not compete with the larger Newport Paramount and Colonial theatres which catered to the masses. As the years went on, the modest size of the Casino Theatre was no competition for the larger houses that generated greater revenue.

The study of the Newport Casino Theatre provides a backdrop against which one can look more closely at a small, American theatrical landscape. The legacy of the Casino Theatre, although flawed, retains its unique tradition while adding one additional chapter to the annals of America's local theatre history. Although not representative of many small American towns during the period between 1880 and 1960, Newport's theatrical composite bears an especially interesting cultural slant, which far exceeded its limited boundaries and population.

The Casino Theatre was more than the summer colony. At the same time, one cannot deny that the colonists forfeited huge revenue to see the best and, more than anyone group, was responsible for the respected name which the theatre earned over the years. The theatre benefited and profited tremendously from the colony money which was spent throughout the entire complex. The Casino Theatre, therefore, cannot be looked at in isolation. To do so would be to misrepresent it. Since the Casino was an ensemble, wherein its members enjoyed the whole complex, the theatre never operated entirely as a separate entity so much as it did as a part of a whole. The interconnectedness that the Casino complex encouraged with the wealthy of Newport tapped into their instinct for uninhibited play. The intimacy and coziness of the theatre offered a private and informal experience by comparison to the structured and formal life to which many had been accustomed. The Casino belonged to the wealthy and created a culture quite separate from the experience of the average Newporter.

Local historian, Leonard Panaggio's opinion that the Casino was responsible for continuing Newport as one of the social capitals of the world merits attention. Panaggio sees the Casino as having kept the summer colony in Newport and calls it "the saviour of

the colony people."⁴ No doubt, it was property ownership and the social calendar that kept the summer residents returning to Newport each summer, but while here, the Newport Casino attracted and satisfied wealthy individuals motivated by a penchant for select socialization. In the small city with the Atlantic Ocean to its east and Narragansett Bay to its west, the Casino, like a tightly nestled country, coexisted amidst the neighborhoods of Newport. With its distinct personality and culture the Newport Casino Theatre initiated a period of cultural ferment in the city which has been unrepeated to this day.

Even with Newport's experience of the mansion-building fervor of the late nineteenth century, which promoted European tastes and values, the Newport Casino was still very much an American resort center of culture. Life had delivered the unexpected with Bennett's commission to McKim, Mead and White.⁵ By applying their knowledge of European art obtained through extensive travels, the results translated into an American concept of architecture. America no longer had to be satisfied with adapting to European standards. Through the Newport Casino, the architects produced a type of place that Americans could identify with. By making use of indigenous materials and employing simple lines of design, the firm scaled down the idea behind the ornate European models and produced something distinctly American. White's varying accents on wood created a warmth and an intimacy in contrast to the impersonal and formal concept which was characteristic of the larger "cottages." The first concept of a country club built in the United States transfixed Newport's Bellevue Avenue and ushered in a most relaxed living that existed throughout the Casino quarters for America's first-class residents. The invention of Bennett's Newport Casino turned out to be a remarkable and a valuable asset to the city.

The main peaks of achievements of the Casino Theatre are shaped by variables

perhaps as unique as that which makes up any given society. Since it first took shape in the mind of James Gordon Bennett, the theatre was one of its kind. The enclave at Newport, not representative of the larger culture, was a catalyst for patronage. The colonists of nineteenth and twentieth-century Newport created a theatrical culture of their own. While engaging in the illusion of a carefree environment⁴ the colonists were firmly entrenched in a political and social structure of their own devising. The situation was not that of summer residents who affected the city for only a few months out of the year. Rather, their presence infiltrated the Newport community on various levels. The Casino Theatre became a symbol of a political and social reality for the Newport citizens as well. Established deeply within the framework of wealth, the colonists actually structured Newport culture. And by doing so, they created a unique kind of an American summer theatre.

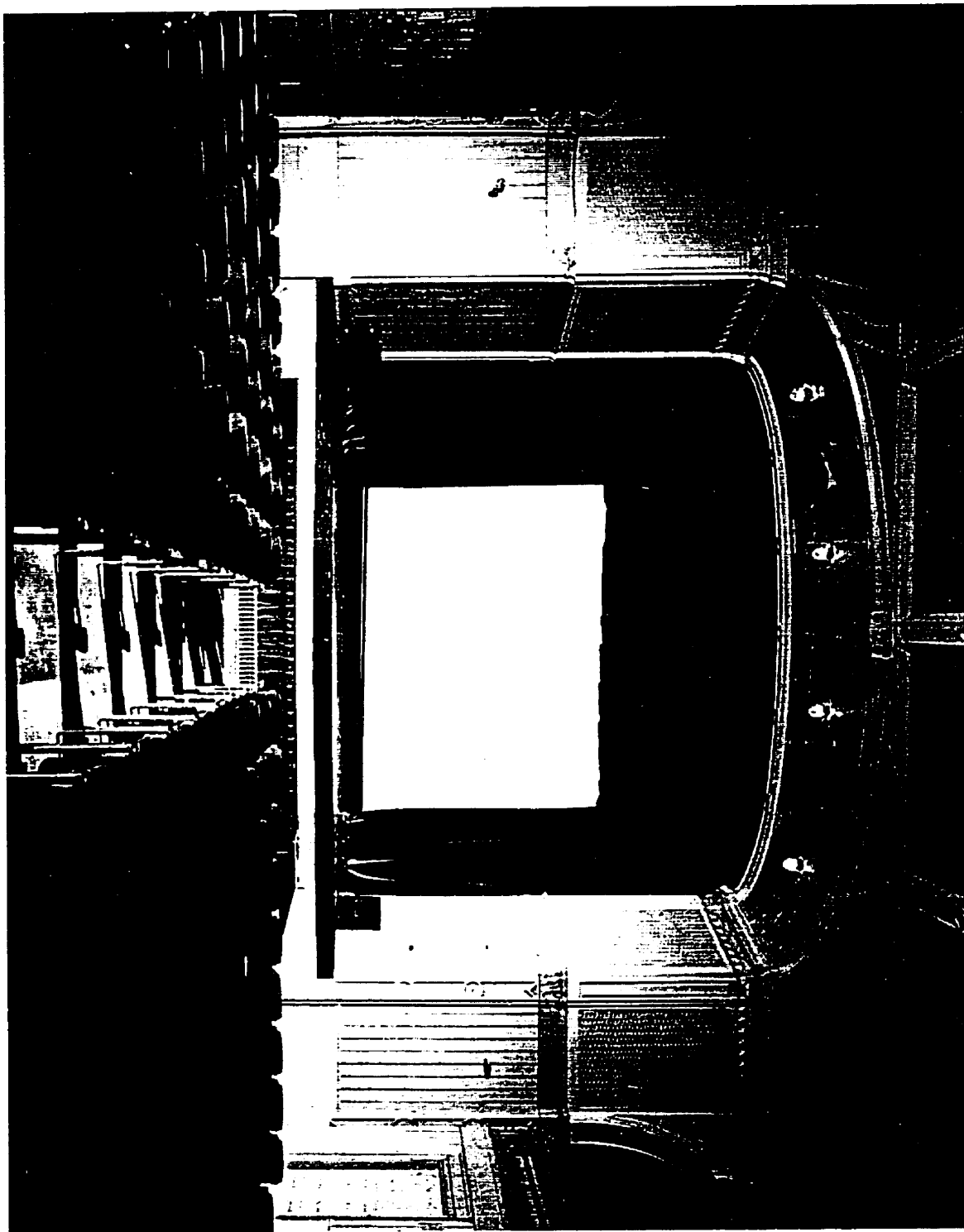
Today the theatre's interior is in sad disrepair, but the exterior still retains its original Victorian stateliness. The sight of the theatre exudes a mystical resonance that bears the vestiges of a lost culture. Situated at the rear of the Casino grounds, its architecture displays the grandeur of the period. The porches that encircle the building on two sides frame the history that echoes a past glory worthy of preservation. As one looks at the wooden structure, what creeps quietly into one's consciousness are the words of a local newspaper writer, Christin Goff, who notes that "due to an apparent lack of interest and financial resources that would be required for a complete **restoration**, the theatre with the great history is dark."⁶ One wonders if the legacy of the past will, in time, become the promise of the future. John Pantalone's question whether the Casino Theatre has become a case study in preservation cultural history raises an important concern.¹ Even with Pantalone's suggestion, the Newport Preservation Society cannot provide the solution for the restoration of the

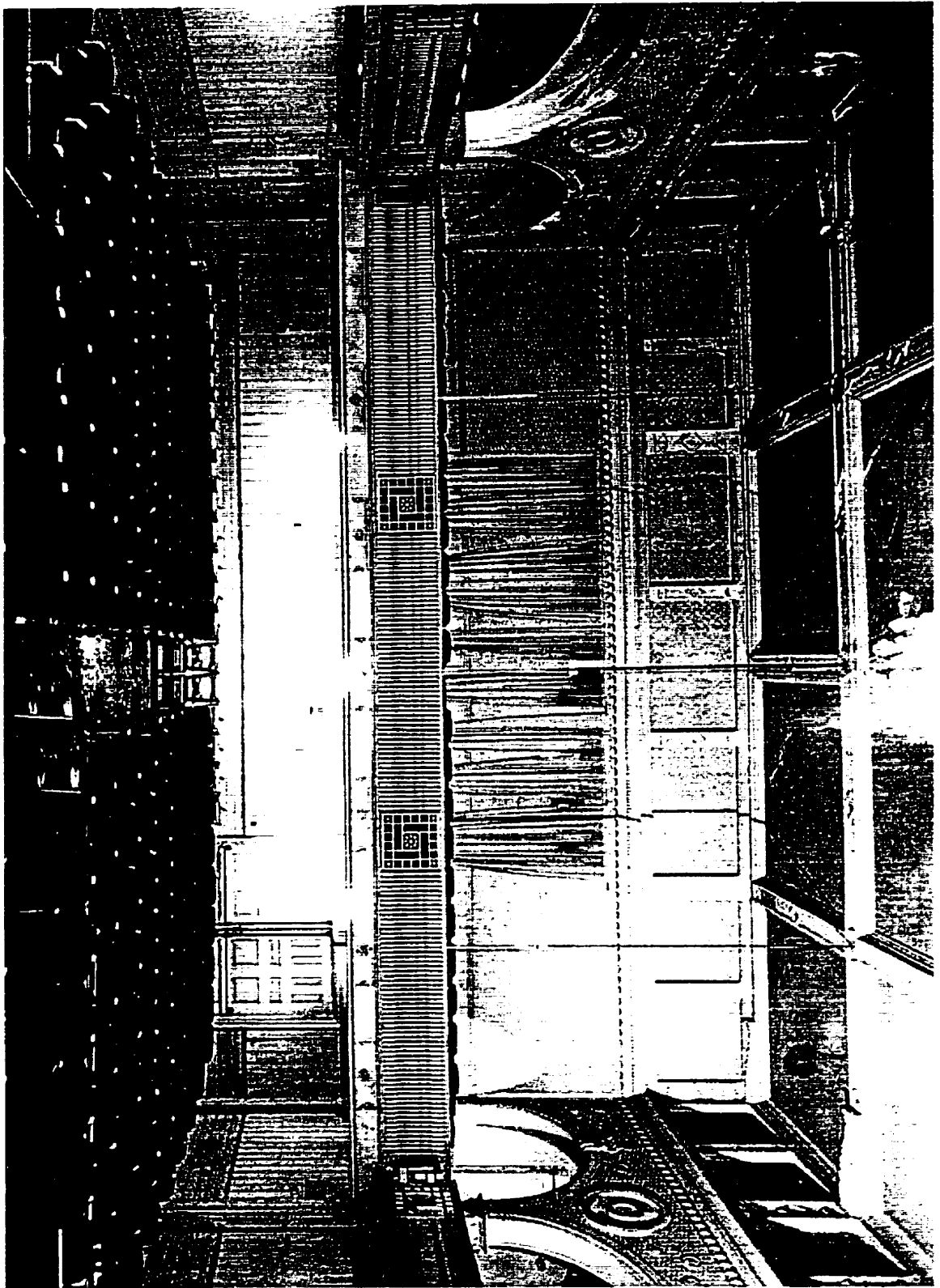
Casino Theatre because the theatre is privately owned by the International Tennis Hall of Fame.

Although for some in Newport the Casino Theatre is a great voice gone silent, it is too soon to render the theatre a **lasting** judgment. The complex which the theatre was once a part of still thrives. After more than one hundred years, the Casino flourishes. In 2001, the city serves as a gateway which links the past with the future, the old with the new. In some respects, two worlds meet in Newport, where the Casino serves as an aperture through which one can view the bygone days of the theatre with the present-day life of the renowned International Tennis Hall of Fame. Consequently, the Casino continues to generate economic stability in Newport as it once did under the colonists' ownership. In a city which is dominated by cultural tourism, it assists Newport in bridging the present with its identifiable past. Because of the contribution of the summer colonists, one of the icons of Newport's cultural heritage, the Casino Theatre, holds a mirror up to the changing nature of Newport society.

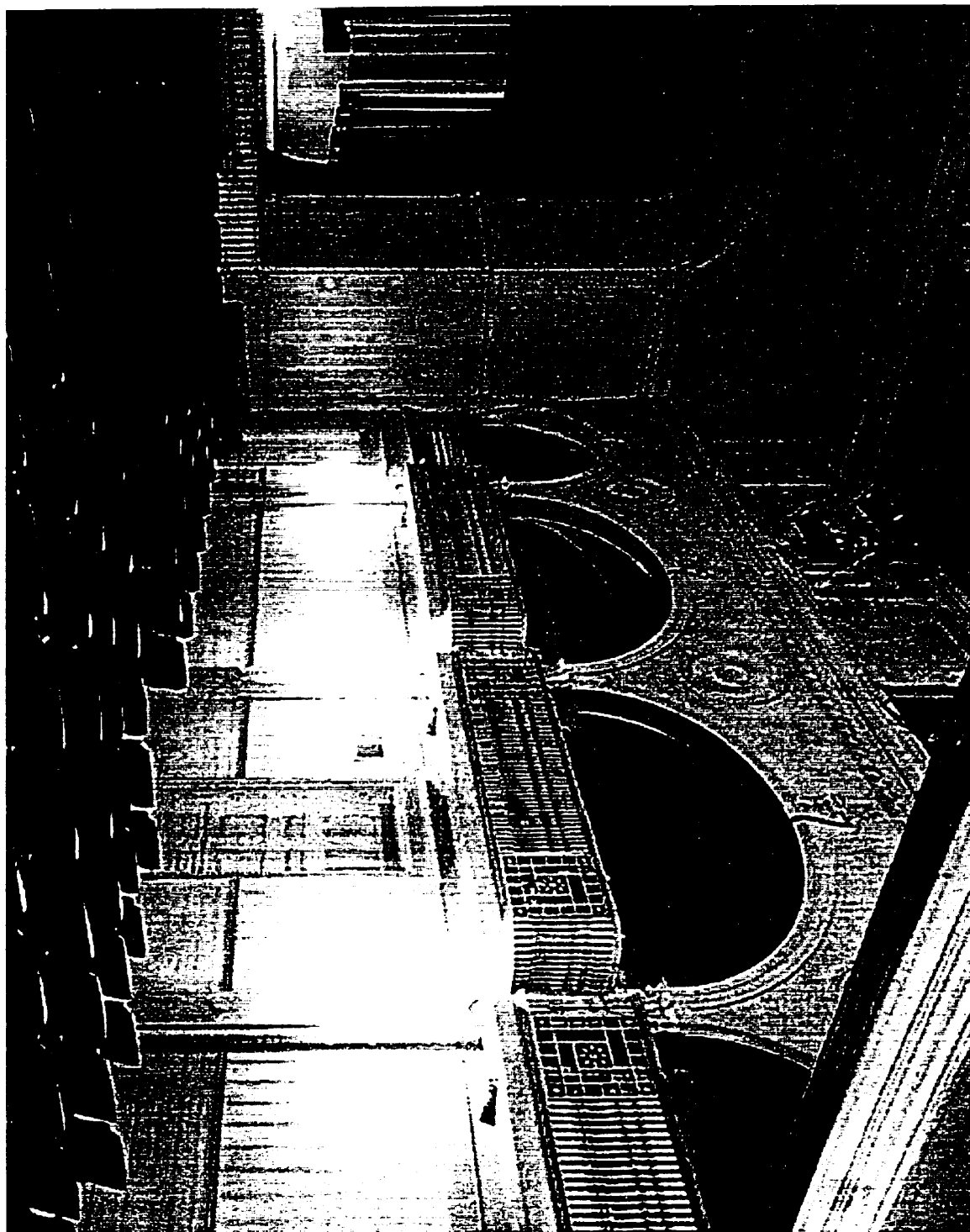
APPENDIX

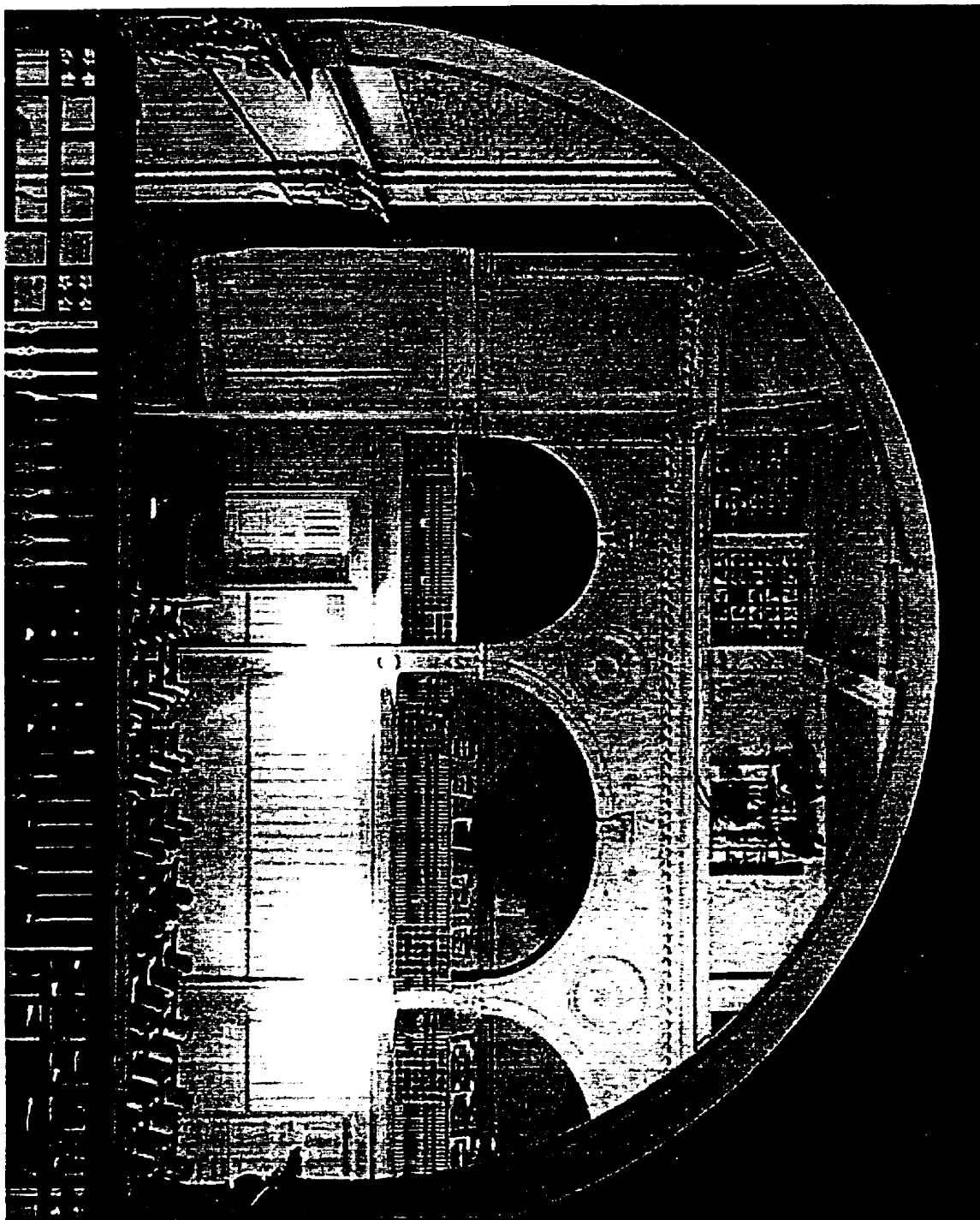
Photographs of the Casino Theatre at Newport, Rhode Island







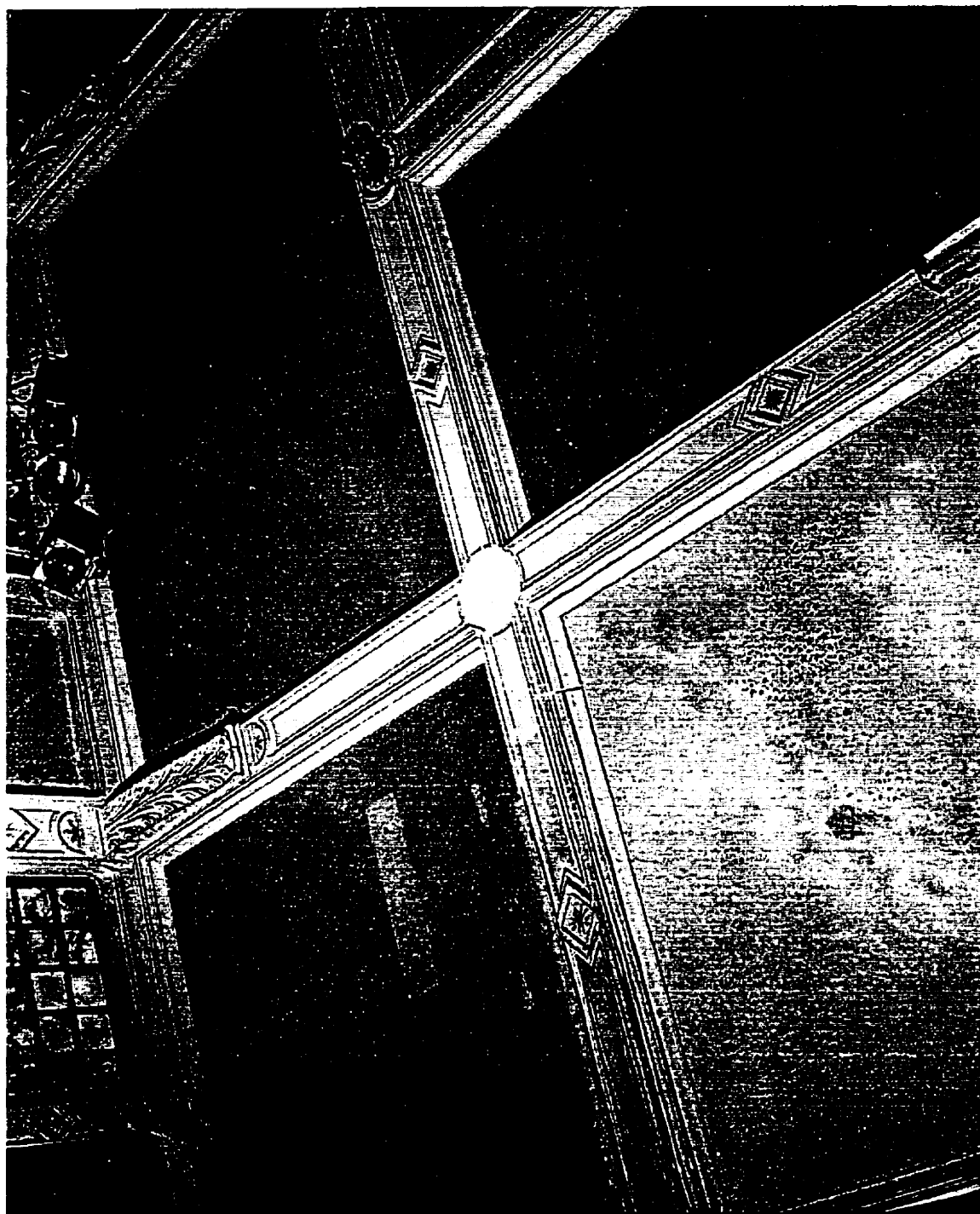


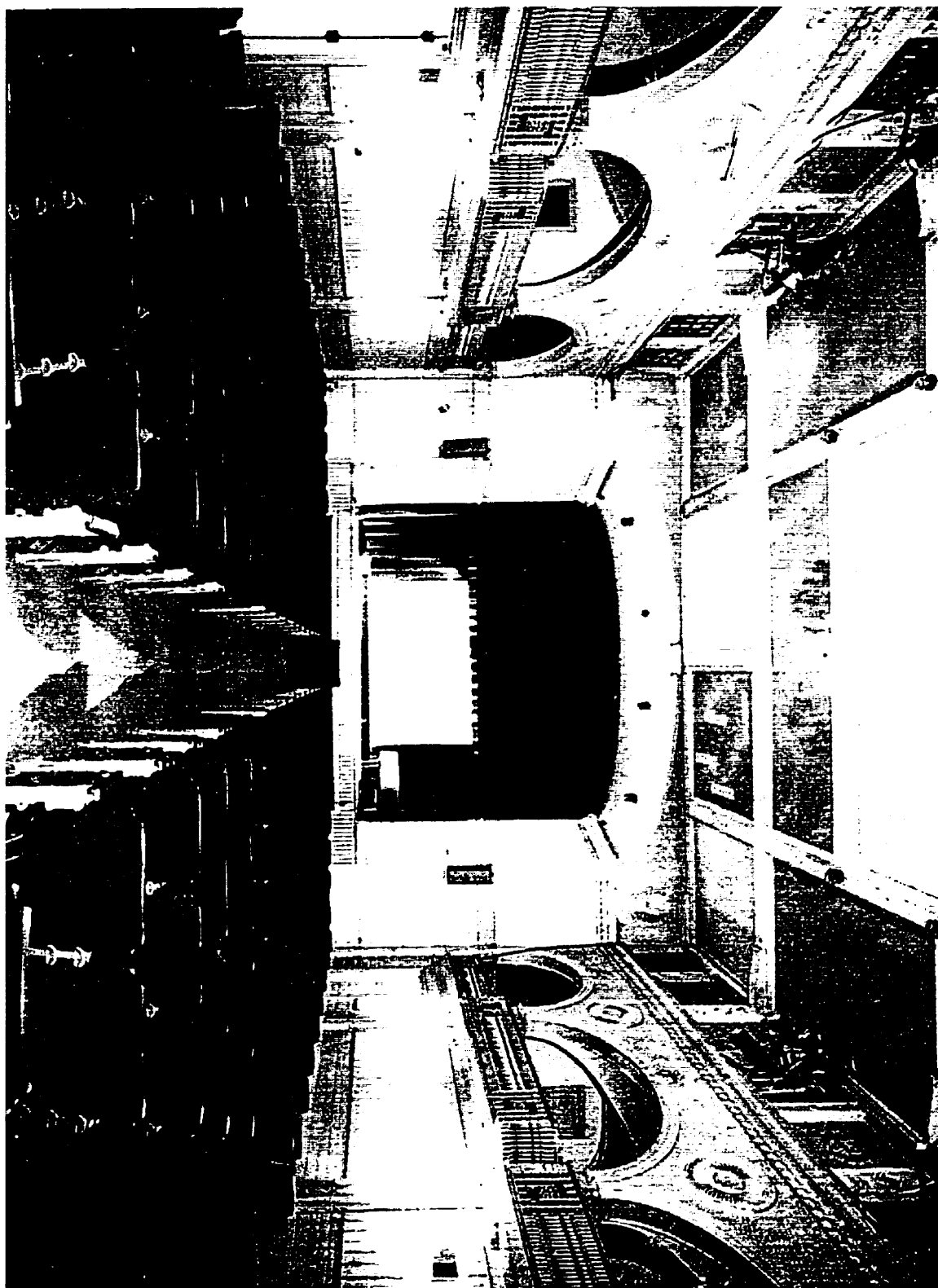


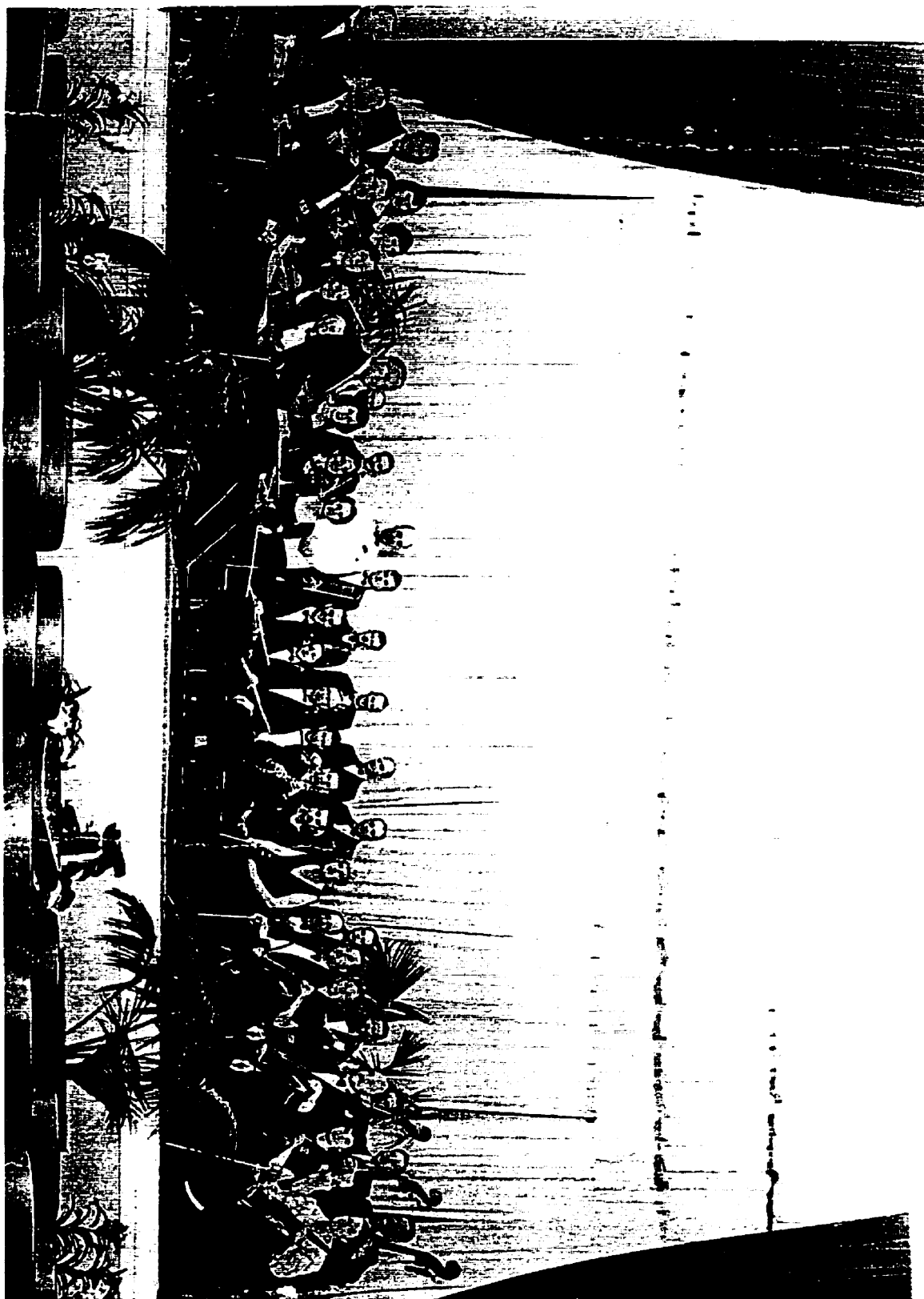


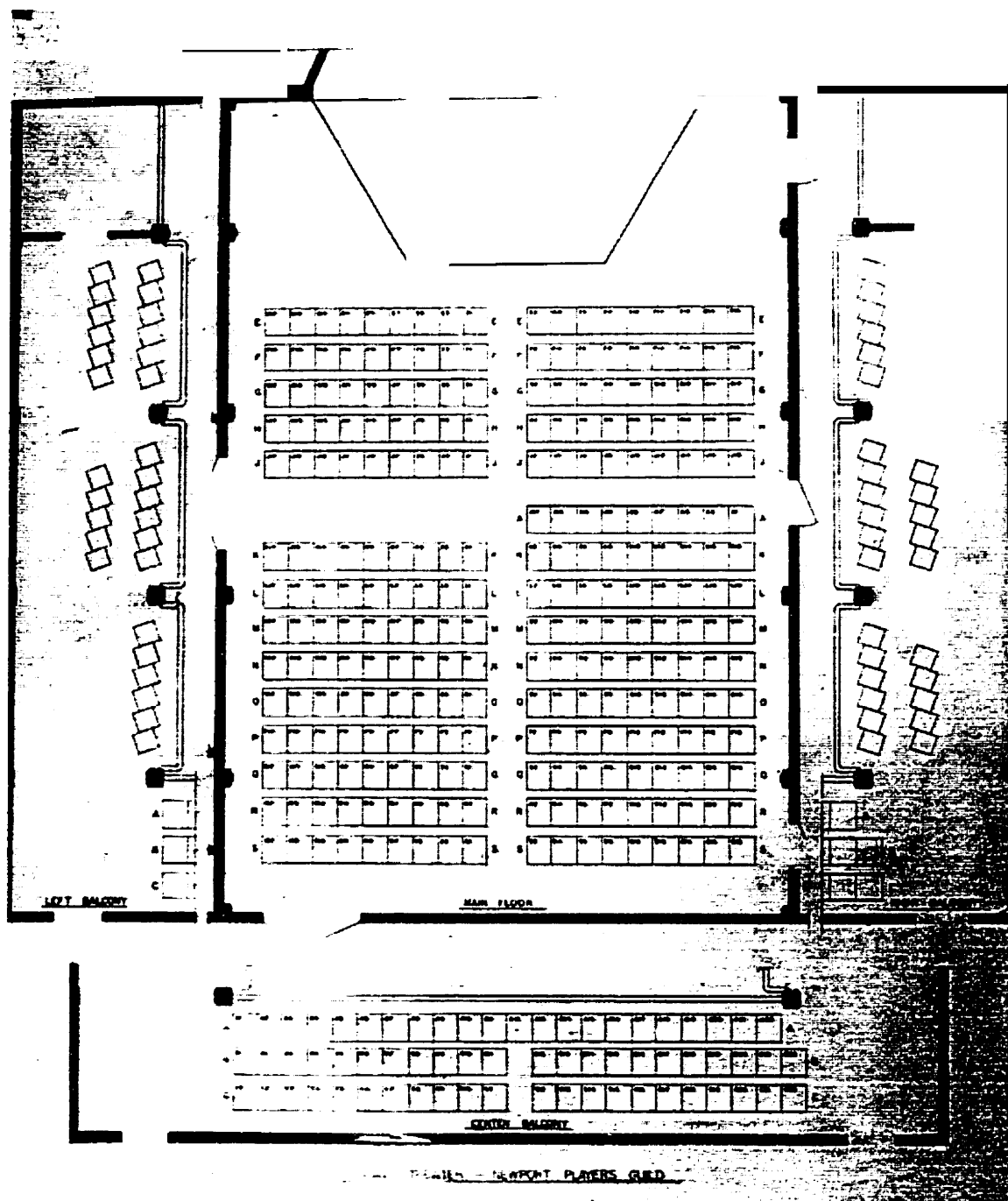












ENDNOTES

INTRODUCTION: THE SEEDS OF THEATRE AT NEWPORT

L British **expatriate**, Lewis Hallam, died while in the British colony of Jamaica, but the troupe amalgamated with another English troupe headed by David Douglass leaving him the manager of the new group.

2. *Newport Mercury*, 20 July 1844.

3. *Newport Journal*, 17 Dec 1867. Dyers Gate is now the site of a naval housing project.

4. *The Newport Journal*, 17 Dec. 1867.

5. Charles Blake, *An Historical Account of the Providence Stage* (1868) 45.

6. Taken from a footnote on p. 5 of George Willardts, *History of the Providence Stage 1702-1891* (1891).

7. Jay M. Eidelman, "Economic And Social Aspects of the Decline of Newport Jewry, 1776-1882," in *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes* (Titusville, Florida: Richard Alan Dow Technical Communications, 1995), 91.

8. Gerald Bordman, *The Oxford Companion to American Theatre* (1992) 206.

9. *Newport Mercury*, 17 May 1793.

10. 8 August 1793 newspaper clipping. Found at the Newport Historical Society. (No documentation available.)

11. *Newport Mercury*, 3 September 1793.

12. As depicted in Broad sides from the Newport Historical Society's Special Collections labeled Box # 1 of miscellaneous materials.

13. All the rents and all the profits that would come from the building were to be put into the town treasury of Newport toward a stock for the purchase of **grain**, for supplying a public granary which never materialized.

14. Norman Morrison Isham, *Report on the Old Brick Market, or Old City Hall. Newport. R.I.* Worcester, MA.: Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, 1916.
15. *Newport Mercury*, 26 May 1795.
16. *Alden Collection* 1369A, Frame 91, THEATRE PROGRAM, 29 May 1794, Newport Historical Society.
17. "History of the Structure of the Old City Hall," Chamber of Commerce, n.d. Found at Newport Historical Society.
18. From 1853 to 1900 the Brick Market Place (or House) was used as a city hall and then finally passed into disuse until 1928 when the exterior was restored. In 1930, it was entirely rebuilt through the generosity of John Nicholas Brown, a descendant of Brown University and a Newport resident. Through special arrangements with Brown, the city of Newport leased the historic landmark to the Newport Chamber of Commerce for a period of thirty years. This transaction reopened the old Market House to the public and assured its preservation for a considerable time. During the 1970s and 1980s, it was basically a gift shop. In 1993, the city leased it once more to the Newport Historical Society for one hundred years at the cost of one dollar per year. In a conversation with Bert Lippincott, reference librarian at the Newport Historical Society, Newport, RI on 27 June 1999.
19. All of these were found in the *Benjamin Howland Collection*, a compilation of productions organized in no special order which is housed in a large box at the Newport Historical Society. The collection appears to cover the years between 1801 and 1831.
20. *Benjamin Howland Collection*, Newport Historical Society.
21. *Benjamin Howland Collection*, Newport Historical Society.
22. The Newport Opera House is located on the Northeast corner of what is known as the Horgan Block at Washington Square.
23. Boyd's *Newport City Directory*, (1856) 734.
24. *Playbill*, 2 and 3 April 1877 housed at the Newport Historical Society.
25. A well known one being Campbell's Minstrels with a nightly change of program. Found in box labeled "Opera House" at the Newport Historical Society.
26. *Program* of 94th celebration of 4th of July, dated 1873.
27. Amidst numerous playbills labeled "Opera House" at the Newport Historical Society.

28. *Playbill*, 22 Jan. 1874.
29. The Starcase in Warwick, R.I., was the other movie theatre chosen because of its large size.
30. The Jane Pickens building is located on its original site at 49 Touro Street (corner Clarke Street) in Newport.
31. *Historic Property Data Sheet 2*.
32. Antoinette Downing and Vincent J. Scully, Jr., *The Architectural Heritage of Newport. RI* (1967) 277.
33. During the summer of 1996, a large party of film stars including Brad Pitt, James Baldwin and wife, Kim Basinger, were pictured relaxing outside the theatre after the film. Also, during the spring of 1997 Newport filming of Steven Spielberg's *Amistad*, Spielberg, Matthew McConaughey and Anthony Hopkins patronized the Jane Pickens several times.
34. Taken from an advertisement in a *Playbill*, Newport Historical Society.
35. *Playbill*, Newport Historical Society.
36. Youngest of three brothers who made names for themselves in the theatrical arena, Charles Frohman was serving as advance agent for traveling shows in 1877 including Haverley's Minstrels which at one time was the pre-eminent touring ensemble in the U.S. responsible for turning the once intimate minstrel show into a huge spectacle. Gerald Bordman 276.
37. Playbills housed at Newport Historical Society.
38. The Quaker building served not only as a community center but also as the Newport Recreation Center which meant that multiple groups used it for various purposes year round. Interview with Bert Lippincott at the Newport Historical Society, June 1999.
39. Emma Stebbins, *Charlotte Cushman: Her Letters and Memories of Her Life* (1878) 244-45.

CHAPTER ONE: THE CASINO BALLROOM THEATRE 1881-1902

L C.P.B. Jeffreys *Newport 1639-1976, An Historical Sketch* (1976) 40.

2. This period is still prior to the turn-of-the-century mansions which were built on Bellevue Avenue South.
3. In 1835, James Bennett, Sr., started the New York Herald in a squalid basement alongside fifteen other newspapers on what was known as Park Row. Richard O'Connor, *The Scandalous Mr. Bennett* (1962), 24.
4. Bennett did, however, visit his family regularly in France. O' Connor 34.
5. O'Connor 77.
6. Lives were lost as a result of this wager which impressed on Bennett not only the tenuous nature of Hfe but also the costly price of a wager. O'Connor 76.
7. The Atlantic cable is a telegraph cable: wires inside an insulator that stretched from Newfoundland to Ireland along the ocean floor. What made the cable practical was the discovery of a rubber-like material from trees in Malaysia called "gutta-percha" which was used to insulate the telegraph wires. Lewis Coe, *The Telegraph: A History of Morse's Invention and its Predecessors in the United States* (1993) 97.
8. O' Connor 80.
9. O' Connor 89.
10. Most of Europe was unaware of what Richard Wagner was doing since only the elite could afford to be involved in the occasion. It is not out of the question that Bennett himself could have been among those present. Somehow he had a sense for significant moments in history. More than likely Bennett would not have known the far reaching effects of Wagner's "music-dramas" and how this small conclave would change forever the way one attended the theatre. But it is possible that Bennett could have witnessed the spectacular integration of the arts in that darkened little theatre at Bayreuth nearly 3200 miles from New York, participating in a moment of theatre history that would make its mark during the latter part of the nineteenth century.
11. Bennett was an initiator, the first to establish the ocean races off Newport. In 1871, he offered a cup to be sailed for by the yachts of all nations, on a course off Brenton Reef Lightship. The Goelet Cup, the Vanderbilt Cup and the cup offered by John Jacob Astor followed in its wake. Maud Howe Elliott, *This Was My Newport* (1944) 221.
12. The Newport Reading Room is a nineteenth-century house-like structure which still exists on its original site, the corner of Church Street and Bellevue Avenue across from the Hotel Viking.
13. Polo expert, Captain **Candy**, a lifelong friend, whom Bennett had met in England

during the 1870s had been invited by the Newport Polo Club to instruct its members on the game of polo. The incident occurred while Bennett and Candy were riding their horses on Bellevue Avenue near the Reading Room a few blocks from where the Newport Casino would eventually be built. *Newport Mercury* 30 August 1884.

14. Bennett owned a number of homes: two in the South of France, one in Paris, one each in Belgium and England, one in Italy and "Stone Villa" in Newport all of which were equipped with a full-time staff ready at any moment to allow his life to continue uninterrupted as soon as he arrived. Lucius Beebe, *The Big Spenders* (1966) 149.
15. From 1870 to 1883 more than sixty new homes were built in the Kay-Catherine-Old Beach Road area alone. C.P.B. Jeffreys 41.
16. Antoinette Downing and Vincent I. Scully, Jr. 161-162.
17. Archives, International Tennis Hall of Fame, Newport, R.I.
18. Downing and Scully .
19. Suzannah Lessard, *The Architect of Desire: Beauty and Danger in the House of Stanford White* (1996) 18.
20. Lessard 85.
21. Lessard 86.
22. Alan T. Schumacher, "The Newport Casino, Its History," *Bulletin of the Newport Historical Society* 1987: 81.
23. Schumacher 45.
24. Downing and Scully 176.
25. Curtis Forbes, *Newport Daily News* 8 July 1987.
26. Cecelia G. Manning, *A Physical History of the Newport Casino. Report Prepared for International Tennis Hall of Fame* (1987) 65.
27. "Notes of Building Operations," *Newport Mercury* 27 March 1880 column 4: 2.
28. Taken from the Newport Casino Governors! Minutes, 30 September 1880
International Tennis Hall of Fame Archives at Newport, R.I.
29. Leonard Panaggio, "What the Casino was Like When it Opened" *Newport This Week Yachting and Recreation* August 1954: .

30. liThe Opening of Mr. Bennett's Casino at Newport," *Newport Mercury* 27 July 1880: 9.
31. The New Theatre in New York had been underwritten by leading New York citizens, including J.P. Morgan and Otto Kahn. The Casino theatre at Newport was another also to be underwritten by wealth.
32. "Local Matters," *Newport Mercury* 7 August 1880: 5.
33. Schumacher 61.
34. Schumacher 45.
35. Schumacher 45.
36. Delmonico's in New York was the leading restaurant to provide for the new fashion or dining out' an activity which New Yorkers were beginning to engage in for the first time.
37. Lessard 84.
38. Court tennis was the type of tennis used in Louis the XN's France enjoyed by the royalty and was a favorite among them.
39. "The Opening of the Casino" *Newport Mercury* 18 June 1881: 6.
40. "Additions to the Newport Casino" *Newport Mercury* 14 May 1881: 5.
41. Schumacher 81.
42. "Local Matters," September *Newport Mercury* 1883: 5.
43. "Glittering Ball at Casino Theatre," *Newport Mercury* 1887: 6.
44. "Description of the Ball" ITHF Archives 20 Jan. 1888: 45.
45. *The Season* was an eight-page local periodical published between June and September during 1886 and 1888 devoted to the summer interests of Newport. However, the paper did not altogether limit its coverage to Newport, but covered some of the more elaborate summer events taking place in Europe during the 1880s. *The Season* 10 July 1886: 4.
46. "The Casino's Annual Ball" *Newport Mercury* 31 Aug. 1889: 5.
47. qtd. in Schumacher 81.

48. "Grande Concert at Casino Theatre," *Newport Mercury* 23 July 1881: 7.
49. "Mme. Howard's Casino Concerts," *Newport Mercury* 20 Aug. 1881: 17.
50. "Mme. Howard's Casino Concerts," 17.
51. "The Closing 'Musical Mornings' at the Casino," *Newport Mercury* 27 Aug. 1881: 18.
52. "The Observance of Sunday," *Newport Mercury* 22 August 1882: 04.
53. *ibid.*
54. *ibid.*
55. *Newport Mercury* 26 August 1881.
56. "City Briefs," *Newport Mercury* 19 Sept. 1881.
57. *Newport Mercury* 29 July 1882: 4.
58. Schumacher 83-84.
59. Hyde H. Montgomery, *Oscar Wilde: A Biography* (1975) 76.
60. Melissa Knox, *Oscar Wilde: A Long and Lovely Suicide* (1994) 175.
61. "Oscar Wilde at the Casino," *Newport Mercury* 22 July 1882: 8.
62. Richard EHmann, *Oscar Wilde* (1988) 227.
63. *New York Times* 12 Aug. 1883.
64. qtd. from the *Pittsfield Sun* July 1883: 7.
65. "A Splendid Concert," *Newport Mercury* 28 July 1888: 5.
66. "Miss Tynte's Readings," *Newport Mercury* 10 Sept. 1892: 4.
67. Casino Archives, Tuesday 17 July 1900: 6.
68. "Local Matters" *Newport Mercury* 13 June 1891: 4.
69. For years, Ocean House had customarily had their own Saturday evening dances and relied on them for income.
70. *The Season* 1886.

71. Schumacher 84.
72. *Newport Mercury*, August 12 1886.
73. *The Season*, 5 Aug. 1886.
74. *The Season* 15 June 1886: 8.
75. Cornelius Vanderbilt, Jr., *Queen of the Golden Age: The Fabulous Story of Grace Wilson Vanderbilt* (1956) 174. .
76. Schumacher 45.
77. "The Casino," *Newport Mercury* 17 Sept. 1887.
78. Following the American Revolution, it was the Southerners who had come to Newport during the summers. But the post-Civil War left Southern gentry less drawn and less able to afford the city.
79. Maud Howe Elliot, *This Was My Newport* (1944) 133.
80. *The Season* 7 July 1886: 27.
81. Maud Howe Elliot 276.
82. The first publication of *The Season* took place on Monday 7 June 1886: i.
83. Ward McAllister, *Society As I Have Found It* (c1890) 167.
84. This included their belongings: horses and coaches, furniture and livestock, livery maidservants and butlers, etc.,
85. One day they might fly to Saratoga for the races, the next day to Paris for art and fashion, while another to London for theatre and then Rome for the opera.
86. Connell often lectured at the Newport Historical Society. One of her favorite topics was the life of Jane Stuart, the daughter of Gilbert Stuart. Lillian Barrett, *Ledger*, Newport Historical Society, Newport, Rhode Island.
87. The club was established in 1871 by Julia Ward Howe and her intellectual and scientific friends, mostly the 'literati' from Boston. Upon its last meeting in 1905, Howe turned its records over to the Newport Redwood Library. Archival Notes, Newport Redwood Library and Atheneum, Bellevue Avenue, Newport Rhode Island, 1934.
88. Julia Ward Howe, *Reminiscences* (c1899) 97.

89. Adele Panaggio, "The Newport Casino" *Newport Gazette* 19 August 1963: 2.
90. Cleveland Amory, *The Last Resons* (1948) 171.
91. Downing and Scully 178.
92. In 1907, Standord White was murdered by Harry Thaw, the ex-husband of White's present mistress, while White was attending a dinner theatre at the Madison Square Garden Theatre which he had designed. The scandal surrounding the Thaw trial affected psychologically the two remaining members of the firm. even though they proved successful in subsequent years in the architectural world.

CHAPTER TWO: BRIEF CANDLE: THE DIVINE MOMENTS 1927-1934

- L Alan Schumacher, "The Newport Casino, It's History," *Newport History. Bulletin of the Newport Historical Society* (1987): 85 .
2. Alan Shumacher, *The Newport Casino, It's History*, 85.
3. Mary C. Henderson, *The City and the Theatre: New York Playhouses from Bowling Green to Times Square* (1973) 244.
4. George Willard, *The History of the Providence Stage, 1762-1891* (1891) 5.
5. "The Newport Casino Theatre Announcements of a Theatre Festival," First *Playbill* of the 1927 Season 26 July: OL
6. "*Hamlet* A Success: Famous Play Presented at Casino Theatre in Modern Dress," *Newport Daily News* 27 July 1927: 16.
7. "*Hamlet* in Newport," *New York Times* 30 July 1927: 16.
8. Hunter had played the same part with John Barrymore and Walter Hampden.
9. "Sydney's *Hamlet*," *Newport Daily News* 27 July 1927:02.
10. "*Hamlet* a Success," 16.
11. *ibid*, 17.
12. "*Hamlet* in Modem Dress," Managers Notes in Program of The Casino Theatre, 26 July 1927: 4.

13. "Starred in Many Plays," an article that appeared in the *Newport Daily News* on 4 August 1927, p.16, spoke of Ware spending the summer of 1927 in Newport with husband Frederick Burt, well known actor who, with Susan GlaspeU and George Cram Cook, gave Eugene O'Neill his start as a playwright.
14. *Newport Daily News* 05 August 1927: 16.
15. "Play Perfectly Done," *Newport Daily News* 10 Aug.1927:16.
16. Patricia Barclay, one of New York's promising ingenues, was given her first leading role by Boston-born producer John D. Williams in association with Carl Reed in *Lally*. Williams was the first to sign John Barrymore for serious roles, when he produced Galsworthy's *Justice*, and brought Eugene O'Neill, America's foremost dramatist, to Broadway when he presented *Beyond the Horizon* with Richard Bennett.
17. When produced by the Neighborhood Playhouse two years earlier (1925), it delighted New York and revealed Mary Ellis in a new light. Up to that time Ellis was thought of as the prima donna of Rose Marie or as the actress who had made *The Dybbuck* the stirring and emotional event of the winter. When Martinez Sierra brought his own company from Spain in the spring of 1927 and presented his play with the Spanish company, critics proclaimed the superiority of Mary Ellis's performance to that of the Spanish actress. "Is Gay and Amusing," *Newport Daily News* 15 Aug. 1927.
18. "Casino Theatre Stars," *Newport Daily News* 15 August 1927: 18.
19. Maude Howe Elliot's husband was one of the founders of the Newport Art Association which in 1994 was renamed the Newport Art Museum.
20. Maude Howe Elliot, "Newport's Opportunity: Best Art, Best Drama and Best Music Available Here," *Newport Daily News* 3 August 1927: 7.
21. Brother of Shelley Hull, matinee-idol of his day, Henry would make his own theatrical mark in 1933, when he created the part of Jeeter Lester, the shiftless sharecropper in *Tobacco Road*.
22. Originally created by Lillah McCarthy in London, this is a role that has subsequently been taken by well regarded actors including Mary Shaw, Dorothy Donnelly, Peggy Wood and Katherine Cornell.
23. *Newport Daily News* 30 August 1927.
24. Arnold Daly's own Irish parents were close friends of Shaw and his family.
25. "Lillian Barrett Ledger," Newport Historical Society, 17 September 1927.

26. The headquarters for the Casino Theatre was in the Casino building located on Bellevue Avenue while the box office was stationed adjacent to the building at Hayden Court.
27. *Newport Daily News* 2 June 1928.
28. *Newport Daily News* 16 June 1928: 08.
29. According to the article "Is A Play Within A Play," *Newport Daily News* 2 July 1928, it is not clear whether this is the Neighborhood Playhouse or Edwin Booth's Players Club. Both establishments had close associations with the Newport Casino Theatre. However, it seems more likely that it is the former since many from there were seen at the Casino when the Neighborhood Playhouse closed in 1927.
30. "Play Scores Success," *Newport Daily News* 11 July 1928: 2.
31. "Many of Summer Colonists to Attend opening Play at Casino Theatre," *Newport Daily News* 10 July 1928: 05.
32. During her teens, Claire was a favorite in musical comedy both in the United States and in England. She captivated London in *The Girl From Utah*. From musical comedy she turned to revues and starred in the *Ziegfeld Follies* for two years. David Belasco was so enchanted with her "Marie Odile" song in *Follies* that he persuaded her to sign a contract with him to appear in *Polly With a Past* and *Daddies* "To be Only in One Play: Ina Claire in Lead at Casino," *Newport Daily News* 14 Jul 1928: 8.
33. *New York Times* 15 July 1928.
34. "Another Success Scored: *The Last of Mrs. Cheyney* Given at Casino Theatre," *Newport Daily News* 18 July 1928: 16).
35. "A.E. Matthews, With Casino Players this Week, Discusses Career in Theatre, It *Newport Daily News* 16 July 1928: 16.
36. Tonge followed the performance at Newport with numerous engagements including *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife* with Ina Claire.
37. During the time, Lonergan was a nationally known director whose latest play was Robert Sherwood's *The Road to Rome*.
38. "Considered Best Yet: *The Swan*, Offering at Casino Theatre, Marked Success," *Newport Daily News* 01 August 1928: 16.
39. When Stanislavsky returned to Russia, Ouspenskaya remained in New York to support truant Richard Boleslavsky, a Stanislavsky disciple, in his American

Laboratory Theatre. Her first success in English on the American stage was Pigeons in *The Saint* by Stark Young. After, she played in *The Jest* with Basil Sydney which was produced by Arthur Hopkins. "Was in Play Last Year: Madame Ouspenskaya to be seen in *The Swan* at Casino Theatre," *Newport Daily News* 30 July 1928: 8.

40. Jamestowners had stopped coming to the Theatre because the late closing hour caused them to miss the last ferry home which was at 11:30 PM.
41. "Play Ranks With Best," *Newport Daily News* 08 August 1928: 16.
42. "*The Grand Duchess and the Waiter*: Acting of Miss Cooper and Basil Rathbone Lift it from Ordinary Success to Stage Triumph," *Newport Daily News* 22 August 1928.
43. "A Succession of Laughs: A Comedy Above the Ordinary," *Newport Daily News*, 29 August 1928: 14.
44. "A Succession of Laughs" 14.
45. Insert, Program for *The Torchbearers*, Newport Casino Company, Inc., 28 August 1928.
46. "Work to Start Immediately on Changes in the Casino Theatre Building", *Newport Daily News* September 1929: 2.
47. "*The Constant Wife* Presented at Casino Theatre," *Newport Daily News* 17 July 1929: 14.
48. Dunton would prove useful to the Theatre later in the 1960s when she donated a sophisticated up-to-date lighting board to then the newly named Van Alen Casino Theatre. Leonard Panaggio, interview, 7 June 1998.
49. "*Interference* Enjoyed," *Newport Daily News* 24 July 1929: 16.
50. "Play Ranks With Best," *Newport Daily News* 31 July 1929: 16.
51. Rev. William A. Buell, "The Golden Age of the Newport Casino Theatre" 1927-1934," Proceedings of a Lecture Series of the Newport Historical Society, 150, Spring 1973, 19.
52. "Play a Distinct Success," *Newport Daily News* 7 August 1929: 14.
53. "It Scores Great Success," *Newport Daily News* 14 August 1929: 16.
54. "Madame Leontovich Captivates Audience in Play," *Newport Daily News* 14 August 1929: 16.

55. Later, in 1932, the Theatre festival would present the newly written *June Moon* by Kaufmann and Lardner. Before the festival would come to a close in 1934, original plays and world premieres would be featured.
56. The phenomenal success of the character sketches (of which Ruth Drapper and Cornelia Otis Skinner appeared to be leaders in the field) was a type of entertainment which rapidly was growing into favor in the United States.
57. "Miss Skinner Gives Character Sketches at Casino," *Newport Daily News* 6 September 1929: 16.
58. *The Oxford Companion to American Theatre* explains that Livingston Platt disappeared at that time after being detained on moral charges, but records that whether he committed suicide or lived somewhere obscurely cannot be determined. p 549.
59. Whitford Kane, *Are We All Met?* (1931) 171.
60. While with the Theatre Guild, Ernest Cossart appeared in its productions of *St. Joan*, *He Who Gets Slapped*, *Anns and the Man*, *The Doctor's Dilemma*, *Caprice*, *Volpone* and *Marco Millions*. He also appeared in the Actors' Theatre productions of *Candida* with Katherine Cornell, and Brock Pemberton's production of *Six Characters in Search of a Author*. Cossart had most recently appeared on Broadway in the Players' Club all star revival of *Milestone* at the Empire Theatre, having finished a successful season in Shaw's latest play, *The Apple Cart*. "Activities Buzzing at Casino Theatre," *Newport Daily News* 8 Jul 1930: 2.
61. "Matinees at Casino Theatre to be Thursday," *Newport Daily News* 18 June 1930: 04.
62. "*Laughing Lady* Best Play of Season," *Newport Daily News* 30 July 1930: 14.
63. "Is In Direct Contrast to preceding Bills," *Newport Daily News* 25 July 1930: 2.
64. "Bill of Plays Presented 50 Years, Discovered," *The Newport Daily News* 28 August 1930: 02.
65. Taken from an archival note in the minutes of a stockholders meeting in 1880. Found in Casino International Tennis Hall of Fame.
66. "The Dramatic Entertainment," *Newport Daily News* 28 August 1880: 2?
67. According to the Newport City Directory in 1880, a Mrs. Eyre (whose name appears in the second play of 1880 cast list (same play) with Robert M. Cushman and could be a relation to Wilson) is listed as a house owner on the corner of Old Beach Road and Fir Street, the city's first subdivision.

68. Obtained in a casual conversation on 17 June 2000 with Bert Lippincott while doing research on this subject at the Newport Historical Society.
69. *Michael and Mary, Mrs. Moonlight and Give Me Yesterday* were among Thomas Farrar's newest productions(ItThe Dover Opens Casino Theatre Season,II *Newport Daily News* 2 Jul1931; 2.
70. Pirondello's *Six Characters In Search ofAn Author* which Powers played during the Spring won extravagant praise from the New York critics, who regarded his performance as one ofthe epoch making events ofthe season. "Production Brings Back Some Old Favorites and Introduces Some New Actors," *Newport Daily News* 2 July 1931:2.
71. "*The Dover Road* Opens Casino Theatre Season," *Newport Daily News*, 8 July 1931:16.
72. Dressler had appeared in well known successes such as *So This is London, The Goose Hangs High* and *Tre/awney ofthe Wells*. In *Exceedingly Small* he had won special acclaim from critics. His most recent New York appearance had been in *Penny Arcade* and *Lysistrata*. "*Mary Rose* Third Bill ofCasino Players," *Newport Daily News* 18 July 1931: 04.
73. "Action Predominates in *The Firebrand*," *Newport Daily News*, 5 August 1931:16.
74. Inescort played Portia in George Arliss's production of*The Merchant ofVenice* and appeared in the all-star cast revival of*Trelawny ofthe Wells*. "*Mary Rose* is a Decided Success," *Newport Daily News* 22 Jul.;18.
75. In collaboration with John Rapheal, Collier wrote and produced Peter Ibbetson with John and Lionel Barrymore in 1917. With numerous stage successes to her name, she had been in Hollywood three times. "*Hay Fever* Presented at Casino Theatre," *Newport Daily News* 19 August 1931: 18.
76. "Large Gathering Greet's American Premiere ofPlay, *The Breadwinner*," [Listed in 'Social Circles' section ofthe *Newport Daily News*] 02 September 1931:2.
77. "*The Breadwinner*. Real Comedy Capably Acted," *Newport Daily News*, 02 September 1931:18.
78. "Is First Presentation in America ofNew Somerset Maugham Play," *Newport Daily News* 29 August 1931: 04.
79. "Audiences Largest in Five Years" *Newport Daily News*, 05 September 1931 :2).
80. It is important to note that the Newport Casino Theatre was not the only local site

chosen for tryouts. The Opera House, discussed earlier, was often a choice as well. The House was built prior to Bennett's Casino and was still active and well known.

81. *New York Times*, July 1932: 16.
82. qt. in "Outstanding Plays Have been Selected," *Newport Daily News* 7 June 1932: 4.
83. "Casino Theatre Play is Racketeer Drama", *Newport Daily News* 24 August 1932:1683.22.
84. "May Decide Casino Future," *Newport Daily News* 30 August 1932: 2.
85. Harold Clunnam, *The Fervent Years: The Group Theatre and the 30s*, (1975) 72.
86. Based on notes from a budget meeting of the Casino stockholders held on 30 August 1932, P 2, that are held in the Archives of the International Tennis Hall of Fame, Newport, R.I.
87. As indicated in "Harry Ellerbe Returns to Casino Company," *Newport Daily News* 8 July 1933: 12, during his summers in Newport, Ellerbe had become so popular with audiences that he was engaged for another season at the request of theatre patrons.
88. Edgar Kent had been in Galsworthy's *Escape* in New York, with George Arliss in several of his productions, and in A.A.Milne's *Give Me Yesterday*. He was likewise a director having staged presentations by the Canadian Repertory Company in Toronto. ("Four Prominent Players in Casino Play," *Newport Daily News* 11 Jul.1933: 4).
89. After graduating from Harvard, Burke spent several seasons as an actor with Ben Greet and other productions before turning to direction. He had the distinction of having given Strindberg's *Easter* its first performance in England. Prior to directing on Broadway, he was known for his fine work in stock companies in Louisville, Baltimore, Minneapolis, Birmingham and Detroit. For five summers he directed the famous Elitch Gardens company in Denver.
90. Ernest Glendinning's record includes appearances in such successes as *The Greeks Had A Word For It*, the Theatre Guild's production of *Strange Interlude*, and *Candlelight*, the revival of Barrie's *Admirable Crichton*. "Ernest Glendinning in Theatre Casino Play," *Newport Daily News* 1 July 1933: 5.
91. "Casino Theatre Has Brilliant Opening," *Newport Daily News* 12 July 1933:14.
92. Purcell's early stage seasons were with Mrs. Fiske, Otis Skinner and George Arliss. Later, on the screen, she acted opposite Robert Montgomery, Adolphe Menjou, William Haines and Buster Keaton.

93. "Says Stage Fright is Terrifying Thing: Irene Purcell Tells of Her Hollywood Experience," *Newport Daily News* 25 July 1933:12.
94. Louden was from Northern Ireland who acted in Great Britain with Sir Frank Benson's Shakespearian Company, with Ben Greet, Granville Barker and others, before coming to America to play Shakespeare with E.H.Sothern and Julia Marlowe. "The Late Christopher Bean Will Re-Introduce Popular Actor, Thomas Louden," *Newport Daily News* 29 Jul. 1933: 12.
95. "Casino Theatre Play is Highly Praised," *Newport Daily News* 02 August 1933:16.
96. "Will Have World premiere in Newport: *The Man in the Zoo* Will Be Staged at Casino Theatre," *Newport Daily News* 28 July 1933:16.
97. "The Man in the Zoo Intensely Interesting," *Newport Daily News* 30 Aug. 1933: 14.
98. "The Man in the Zoo Intensely Interesting," 14.
99. Son of Edward Garnett, famous literary critic who discovered Joseph Conrad, Stephen Crane and a dozen other authors for the British public. His mother, Constance Garnett, translated many of Dostoevsky's and Turgenieffs novels from Russian into English. His grandfather was curator of the British Museum. "Will Have World Premiere in Newport," *Newport Daily News* 28 July 1930: 16.
100. Feather bedding is the process whereby a strong union requires that an employer hire or retain employees who have little or no work to do. This is done in order that the union can keep its members employed and have plenty of workers so that no one has to work too hard. This, of course, lowers productivity and can harm or destroy the employer.
- 101 The list of famous dramatists in whose plays Witherspoon had created important parts included Herman Behr, Ferenc Molnar, David Belasco, George M. Cohan, Robert Sherwood, George Kelly, Owen Davis, Alfred Savoir, Guy Bolton and Somerset Maugham. "Cora Witherspoon at Casino Theatre," *Newport Daily News* 16 July 1934: 5.
102. The first play of Clarence Dane was well known not only from its previous stage performances, but also from the fact that it played before thousands as a film production with John Barrymore and Katherine Hepburn as featured stars.
103. Although Waram's early stage career was in England, he was identified with the American theatre for many seasons. Appearing in numerous Theatre Guild productions, in 1933 he acted in Maxwell Anderson's *Mary of Scotland* in company with George Coulouris, Ernest Cossart and Mary Michael. "Percy Waram to Play at Casino Theatre," *Newport Daily News* 23 Jul 1934: 9.

104. Starr had just closed in Dan Tothoro's *Moor Born* which toured the following Fall. Her Charlotte Bronte was proclaimed by the critics as one of the finest portrayals of character ever seen on the New York stage. "Record Crowd Enjoys *Bill of Divorcement*," *Newport Daily News* 25 July 1934: 14.
105. Although acting only a few seasons, Hone played Shakespearian leads with Fritz Lieber at the Jolson Theatre in New York, and with an English-speaking company on a tour of Egypt. She acted Eva Le Gallienne's role in *Cradle Song* on tour for an entire season, played in Philip Barry's *Joyous Season* with Lillian Gish, and in the spring of 1934 acted the title role in the revival of Ibsen's *Lady From the Sea*. "Humorous Barrie Play at Casino Theatre." *Newport Daily News* 1 August 1934: 14.
106. "Thelma Marsh Returns to the Casino Theatre," *Newport Daily News* 18 August 1934: 2.
107. "Sprightly Comedy at Casino Theatre," *Newport Daily News* 15 August 1934: 16.
108. The opera closed in the Spring and reopened the following Fall in New York.
109. "*Kykunkor* Proves Remarkable Production: Casino Theatre Offering is Faultless," *Newport Daily News* 05 September 1934: 18.
110. Helen Arthur left her position as secretary of the Shuberts to join the Neighborhood Playhouse. She managed the Playhouse until its closing in 1927. Before this time, Arthur had practiced law in New York City.
111. The method became one of America's chief styles of acting that developed from an interpretation of Stanislavsky's philosophy and craft which had strong influence after the actor-director's visits to this country.
112. *The Oxford Companion to American Theatre* 549.
113. Gavan 33.
114. Gardner Dunton. "Covering the End of a Glittering Era at Newport 1926-1958," *Providence Journal* September 1958: 17.
115. Shumacher 89.
116. In a statement released by the *Newport Daily News*, Harry Ellerbe who acted regularly at the Casino had recently appeared in *Murder on a Honeymoon* and *So Red the Rose* with Pauline Lord for Paramount Pictures.

CHAPTER THREE: THE FEMININE ERA 1935-1960

1. Whitford Kane, *Are We All Met?* (1931) 172.
2. In addition to designing sets, Farrington was well known for her architectural designs. She built models of houses for Ralph Adams Cram, architect of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York, for Voorhees, Gmelin and Walker and for the Boston firm of Derby and Walker. She won honorable mention at the New York Architectural League Show for her creation of an unusual Florida house. "Who's Who Section" in Newport Casino Theatre Playbill of James Thurber and Elliott Nugent's *The Male Animal*, 1941: 8.
3. Schumacher 82.
4. "Casino Theatre Leased to Actor Managers, Inc.," *Newport Daily News* 20 February 1935: 03.
5. Taken from Archival Notes of a Stockholders Meeting, International Tennis Hall of Fame, Newport, RI, 07 March, 1935.
6. Arthur was a lawyer in New York City who had served as executive secretary for the Shuberts. She left that position to join friend, Lillian Wald, who had established the Henry Street Settlement House for the immigrant population. Attached to the Settlement was the Neighborhood Playhouse, an alternative form of theatre to the commercial theatres of New York, which Arthur managed from 1915 to 1927. Alice Lewisholm Crowley, *The Neighborhood Playhouse: Leaves From a Theatre Scrapbook* (1959) 137.
7. "Casino Theatre," *Newport Daily News* 07 Sept. 1935: 01.
8. "Short Casino Theatre Season is Arranged." *Newport Mercury* 26 Jul 1935: 02.
9. "Short Casino Theatre Season is Arranged" *Newport Daily News* 12 May 1935: 12.
10. Clean Throckmorton was a respected and prolific American designer who, by his retirement in the early 1950s, had designed over 150 plays, among them O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* and *All God's Chillun Got Wings*. *The Oxford Companion to American Theatre* 668.
11. "Subscribe Now to the August Season," *Newport Daily News* 03 August 1935: 07.
12. Advertisement, *Newport Daily News* 03 Aug. 1935: 1L

13. The Colonial, the Paramount, the Strand and the Opera House were the movie houses that led the way at the time for such choices.
14. Selwart appeared as Tzarevitch in *The Patriot* and as young Raleigh in *Journey's End*. Katherine Cornell saw him abroad and suggested he come to America. He had acted at Eva LeGalliene's Civic Repertory Theatre where he understudied in *Camille* while perfecting his English. In Newport, he created the leading role in *The Pursuit of Happiness*. When hired at the Casino, he was appearing in New York with Helen Menken in *The Laughing Lady*.
15. "Berkeley Square is Casino Production," *Newport Daily News* 5 August 1936: 02.
16. Powell went from St. George's Preparatory School in Middletown, R.I. to Columbia and ended up as a student of George Pierce Baker at Yale. He published numerous essays and novels. *Brief Candle* along with a shorter piece, *Improper Guardianship*, was published in book form.
17. "Newport Sees itself at Casino Theatre," *Newport Daily News* 12 August 1936: 9.
18. Schumacher 80.
19. "Playwright Gives Talk on City's Problems," *Newport Daily News* 08 September 1936: 9.
20. "Casino Theatre May Not Open Next Year," *Newport Daily News* 20 August 1936: 2.
21. "The Critic Opens Final Theatre Week," *Newport Daily News* 26 August 1936: 14.
22. Eric Swift, pen name for Eric Siepmann, was an Englishman who was a former New York correspondent for the *London Times*.
23. Ivan Noe was one of a group of French playwrights heard from immediately after World War I. Noe had several plays produced in Europe and this particular piece was shown in Paris and in New York at the French Theatre under the title of *Christian* and performed by a French cast.
24. *Newport Mercury* 1936.
25. "Tonio Selwart Delights Autumn Crocus Patrons," *Newport Mercury* 13 August 1937: 04.
26. Cecilia Loftus 1937.
27. Merchant had two plays on Broadway, *Evergreen Lady*, a comedy and *New Englander*, a tragedy.

28. "The Dramatist Has Premiere at Casino," *Newport Mercury* 03 September 1937: 04.
29. The Newport Players Guild was a local group of amateur actors (second largest in Rhode Island) who rented the Casino Theatre building during the winter **beginning** in 1938. It ceased its operation when the Blizzard of 1978 made the theatre unfit for use. "Six of Players Guild in Cast of *Fashion*," *Newport Daily News* 23 July 1938.
30. "Cecilia Loftus Pleases With Her Impressions," *Newport Mercury* 19 Aug. 1938: 05).
31. "French Without Tears Wins Casino Audience," *Newport Mercury* 26 August 1938: 04.
32. "Marriage Royal Stars Lucile Watson at Casino," *Newport Daily News* 23 August 1939: 14.
33. Gladys Cooper made her American debut in *The Shining Hour* with Raymond Massey. Since then she had acted with Philip Merivale in *Othello*, *Macbeth*, the Theatre Guild production of *Cal! It A Day* and in *Close Quarters*. Some of her roles in revivals were *The Importance of Being Ernest*, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, *The Letter*, *Peter Pan* and *The Last of Mrs. Cheyney*. 1939
34. Philip Merivale was first seen by American audiences in *Pygmalion* with Mrs. Patrick Campbell. Since then he appeared as Hannibal in *The Road to Rome* opposite Jane Cowl and as Bothwell in *Mary of Scotland* with Helen Hayes. Among his title roles *Death Takes a Holiday*, *Cynara* and *Valley Forge*. In 1935 he played Macbeth and Othello alongside his wife, Gladys Cooper.
35. Two weeks earlier Doris Dalton had acted with Douglas Montgomery in *The Firebrand* at Ogunquit. She passed the previous summer playing leads at Skowhegan, Maine. Recently she had been seen on Broadway opposite Henry Fonda in *Blow Ye Winds*. Also she had the lead female role in Kaufmann and Hartts *The Fabulous Invalid*. The spring of 1939 saw her opposite Philip Merivale in the American premiere of *No War In Troy* at Ann Arbor where she also appeared in Elmer Ricets *American Landscape*.
36. Yes. *My Darling Daughter*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Dear Octobus* are listed among Lucille Watsons stage appearances, and she had recently received a critics award for her work in film.
37. "Town Night Planned for Casino Theatre," *Newport Mercury* 26 July 1939: 05.
38. Charles Follet McKim, the eldest in the firm, married Annie Belknap from the Point section in Newport even though the marriage did not last.
39. "Obituaries," *New York Times* 10 December 1939: 2/2.

40. Having just completed the lighting for Jane Cowl's *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* at Princeton, N. J., Emeline Roche that same year (1940) was in charge of details for *The Male Animal* in New York. She was also technical director for *Grand Hotel*, *The Animal Kingdom*, *Reunion in Vienna* and *The Late Christopher Bean*.
41. Nancy Rogers had served seven years on the editorial staff of *Town and Country*. During World War II, she had managed funds for the British and Canadian Patriotic Fund for the wives and children of men overseas.
42. "Casino Civic Theatre Office Opens Today," *Newport Daily News* 17 June 1940: 04.
43. Massey had authored two plays, *Plots and Playwrights*, a farce which was produced at the Comedy Theatre in March, 1917, by the Washington Square Players, forerunners of the Theatre Guild. Katherine Cornell appeared in the two-act production, and she and the play both received good notices from the critics. Another play *Box Seats* was produced at the Little Theatre in April, 1928, with Gordon M. Leland, a former drama critic of *The Billboard*, as producer. "Who's Who" Section in Newport Casino Theatre Playbill of James Thurber and Elliott Nugent's *The Male Animal*, 1941: 8-9.
44. "Newport Casino Theatre," *Newport Daily News* 26 October 1939: 4.
45. "Casino Theatre Work on Changes Underway," *Newport Daily News* 2 November 1939: 5.
46. "Miss Stamm to Direct 1945 Season," *Newport Mercury* 25 August 1944: 08.
47. Gambrelli who was also remembered as the premiere danseuse at the Capitol and Roxy Theatres in New York had danced in many European capitals at the head of her own ballet company. "Casino Opener to Star Met. Opera Ballerina," *Newport Mercury* 25 May 1945: 02.
48. "Gay Operetta Closes 18th Playhouse Season," *Newport Mercury* 07 September 1945: 08.
49. "*Dream Girl* Opens Casino Summer Plays," *Newport Daily News*, 24 June 1947: 05.
50. "*Dream Girl* Opens Casino Summer Plays," *Newport Daily News* 24 June 1947: 8-9.
51. "Casino First Nighters Provided With Comedy," *Newport Mercury* 04 July 1947: 07.
52. "Casino Sale Voted by Stockholders," *Newport Daily News*, 14 January 1948.
53. "This [land] was acquired in the fall of 1947 by Alderman Charles E. Maloney of Newport and John de Grossa, former Holy Cross football coach for \$20,000." Cecilia Manning, *A Physical History of the Newport Casino* (1987) 76.

54. Cecilia Manning 78.
55. Schumacher 83.
56. "Casino Theatre Plans Academy of Drama,' *Newport Daily News* 12 Sept 1948: 05.
57. "Theatre Managers Arrive for Season," *Newport Mercury and Weekly News* 14 June 1948: 7. In this same article Clovelly is credited with having discovered many of the days screen favorites, including Bette Davis, Dorothy Lamollr, Susan Hayward, Lee Bowman, John Howard, Phyllis Calvert, James Mason and Osa Massen.
58. Barrere began his dramatic work in New York in *Brother Rat*, later for three years in *Life With Father*. During the winter of 1948 he was stage manager for *Medea* in which Judith Anderson starred. "Theatre Managers Arrive For Season," *Newport Daily News* 4 June 1948.
59. *Theatre Arts Magazine* 1948
60. "Pursell Adds Zest to *Charley's Aunt*,If *Newport Mercury* 20 August 1948: 05.
61. "Top Stage, Film Stars To Appear at Casino," *Newport Mercury*, 2 June 1949: 2.
62. "Casino Presentation Holds First Nighters," *Newport Mercury* 15 July 1949: 03.
63. "Casino Theatre Play Draws High Praise.." *Newport Mercury* 22 July 1949 : 3.
64. "From to Orsen Wells," *Newport Daily News* 1950.
65. "Roman Catholic Priests Denounce Current Casino Theatre Production," *Newport Mercury* 3 August 1951: 1.
66. "Streetcar Opens at Casino," *Newport Mercury* 05 Aug. 1951:03)
67. "Save The Casino," *Newport Daily News* 27 July 1954: 8.
68. "Sara Stamm Happy To Be Back, Readies Casino Theatre for Opener," *Newport Mecury and Wee/Icy News* 10 July 1959: 4.
69. Leonard Panaggio, interview, 7 July 1998.
70. William Gale, *Newport Daily News*
71. "From Society Pet to Parking Lot..," *Newport Daily News* 3 October: 1961: 9.

CONCLUSION: THE PATRONS' THEATRE, A BEGINNING AND AN END

1. The permanent summer residents of Newport were a subculture not in the ordinary sense of the use of that word today.
2. It is recorded that when Bennett purchased the land, there was a single, small barn-like structure on the premises. Andrew Kaull, "From Society Pet to Parking Lot," *Providence Evening Bulletin* 3 October 1961: 9.
3. Martin Esslin, *An Anatomy of Drama* (1976) 33.
4. Leonard Panaggio, Interview on 7 July 1998.
5. The prolific and well regarded firm of the century, McKim, Mead and White, "was clearly the architect of choice for the most prestigious projects of the era," especially the years between 1879 and 1912. The firm would succeed in influencing the next forty years of American architecture. Samuel G. White, *The Houses of McKim, Mead & White* (1998) 1.
6. Christin L. Goff, "The Casino Theatre: Past, Present, Future," *Newport This Week*, 17 Jul 1997: 25.
7. John Pantalone, "Will The Casino Theatre Make a Comeback," *Newport This Week*, 22 April 1993: 11.

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Newport Mercury (oldest private local newspaper in the United States since its inception in 1670)

Newport Daily News

The Season

Providence Journal

Newport This Week

New York Times

Pittsfield Sun

Providence Evening Sun

Special Collections

The Archival Theatre Resources at the Museum of the International Tennis Hall of Fame at the Newport Casino

Superintendent's Notes

Stockholders' Minutes

Photographs

Scrapbooks

Records

Playbills

General correspondence notes

Clipping Files

Annotated Notes

Program files

Legal papers

Ephemera

Newport Historical Society

Special collections of papers

unpublished material

Playbills

Broadsides

Alden Collection

Benjamin Howland Collection

Sprague Collection

Pamphlets

Bulletins

Letters

Diaries

Ledgers

City maps

Directories

Correspondence files

Interviews

Newspaper clippings

Program Files

Ephemera

**Newport Redwood Library and Athenaeum (the oldest private functioning library
in the United States)**

Scrapbook collections

Playbills

The Newport Public Library

Newport Collections Vertical File (Index of unpublished materials)

Documentary collections